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THE BHAKTI TRADITION IN KASHMIRI POETRY

(RESEARCH PROJECT)

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1) *Consolidated Report*

2) *Research Papers*

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CONSOLIDATED REPORT

1. The importance of Bhakti as a major tradition of Kashmiri poetry has not been examined or analyzed in the proper perspective. Not only has it not received the attention it deserves, there is a general tendency to dismiss it as religious poetry and, therefore, of very little or practically no value. As a consequence, some of the best Bhakti poets of Kashmiri like Paramanand and Krishna joo Razdan have suffered from a biased evaluation and even marginalization despite having enriched Kashmiri poetry in no less a measure than those representing other poetic trends and currents who are held way up in esteem just because there is no religious tag attached to what they have written. The fact is that much of Kashmiri Bhakti poetry, or Lila poetry as it is popularly called, has been hardly explored for the poetic values and the creative idiom that distinguish it. At the other extreme is the tendency to value it only for its religious content, which again has led to a lopsided appraisal of its attainments. For me Kashmiri Bhakti poetry reveals, a unique fusion of creative intuition with spiritual experience which helps us to reach the innermost accesses of the human soul. Its initial upsurge in the 14^{th} century influenced by Shaiva philosophical thought and re-emergence in the works of the great Lila poets of the 18^{th} - 19^{th} century who looked to the Vaishnava Bhakti movement of North India for inspiration can be regarded as very significant developments in the literary history of the Kashmiri language.

2. This study is an attempt to explore in all its dimensions the Bhakti - centred poetic tradition in Kashmiri bringing to light a whole fascinating but forgotten world of sensibility and idiom, creativity and contemplation, symbol and allusion, though and emotion, belief and speculation, insight and imagination. The canvas is quite vast and the present conditions in Kashmir are not quite conducive for accessing all the materials needed for an intensive research. My emphasis is therefore naturally on discovering and highlighting hitherto unexplored areas within the available range of reference. For the sake of convenience the study has been divided into six parts covering major aspects of individual creativity in the field, progress reports about the work done being complemented by research papers on related topics under the titles given below:

1. Beginnings of Bhakti in Kashmir
2. Shrikrishnavatar Lila - A Preliminary Appraisal
3. Keshav Prakash of Keshav Razdan – The Radha Svayamvar Theme
4. Paramanand: The Devotional Rapture of Krishna Lila
5. The Ramayana Theme in Kashmiri Literature
6. The Concept of Bhati in Krishna joo Razdan

3. **Beginnings of Bhakti in Kashmir** - Commencing work on the project I have focused on the beginning of Bhakti in Kashmir and its expression in poetry and have come up with some original research. Some of the points made by me are in my research paper on the subject are as follows:

(i) One of the earliest exponents of Bhakti, Thirumalur, who helped giving shape to the Bhakti movement in the Tamil-speaking region, came from Kashmir. More details about him, however, need to be explored, which can form the subject matter for another research project.

(ii) There are two phases of the Bhakti movement in Kashmir, the first devoted to Shiva which saw Lal Ded emerge as its greatest representative, and the second, a later phase, which threw up great poets like Paramamand,

Prakash Ram Kurigami and Krishna Joo Razdan who mainly draw upon Rama and Krishna legends for inspiration. As in other regional languages, Bhakti poetry in Kashmiri has two main varieties: one based on *Nirguna Bhakti* or devotion to an attributeless, non-personal God; and the second giving expression to *Saguna Bhakti* or devotion to a personal God with attributes *(Ishtadeva)*. The Shiva or the Parma Shiva of the Shaiva poets is not the Shiva of mythology He refers to the Ultimate Reality without any form or attributes.

(iii) I have presented Lal Ded or Lalleshwari as the chief exponent of devotional Shaivism which marks the first phase of Bhakti movement in Kashmir. Among others things I have pointed out that elements of mysticism and Bhakti in Lal Ded's poetry can be traced to a tradition continuing from the early Shaiva devotional poets like Bhatta Narayana (9^{th} century) and Utpaldeva (9^{th}-10^{th} century). There are remarkable similarities between the works of all the three poets who can be regarded as the earliest Bhakti poets of Kashmir. Some of these similarities have been dwelt upon in the paper. Their devotional verses emanate from their spiritual quest and experience. One distinction, however, has to be noted – and this distinction is quite significant. While Bhatta Narayana and Utpaladeva wrote in Sanskrit, the language of the cultural elite, Lal Ded chose to express herself in colloquial Kashmiri, the workday language of the common masses. She also took her images from the every day life of the common folk.

(iv) Seeds of Vaishnava Bhakti sprouted in Kashmir as early as the 9^{th} –10^{th} centuries. According to Dr. Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, the singing of songs celebrating the exploits of Krishna (and also of Rama) was prevalent in Kashmir during that period, as it was in Orissa, Bengal and other parts of India. Anandavardhana, the great Kashmiri aesthete, is among the first to have referred to Radha by name. Kshemendra, the 11^{th} century Kashmiri

polyglot, too was familiar with her name. Kshemendra, in fact, preceded Jayadeva in writing the 'Dashavatara Charit' which later became a convention with the Bhakti poets. Kshemendra has written a beautiful lyric describing the feelings of the Gopis after Krishna left for Mathura. This lyric has been quoted by me in the paper, citing the authority of Dr. Hazari Prasad Dwivedi.

(v) The concepts of *Avatara* and *Lila* were very significant for Vaishnava Bhakti poets of Kashmir. Today any work of devotional poetry is called Lila in Kashmiri.

(vi) Kashmiri Bhakti poets were aligned with no particular school or sect. Nor did they have any great theologist to provide a philosophical underpinning to their works. Yet it has to be noted that Kashmir did produce scholars like Keshav Bhatta Kashmiri who played an important role in spreading and interpreting the doctrine of the Nimbarka school.

4. My research paper on the beginnings of Bhakti in Kashmir is only of an introductory nature. With certain changes and additions it can serve as a background paper for the initial chapter of a book on the subject — which I propose to write.

5. **Shri Krishnavatar Lila**

Having done some original research on "The Beginnings of Bhakti in Kashmir", and bringing out my findings in the shape of a research paper, I took up for study some relatively unexplored areas in the history of Kashmiri poetry pertaining to the tradition of Krishna Bhakti or devotion to Krishna. In my project my main focus has been on two important poetic works on which very little or practically no work has been doe so far. These are : "Shri Krishnavatara Lila" supposed to have been written by Dina Nath, and 'Keshav Prakash' by Keshav Razdan. My study of the two works remained confined to their

preliminary critical appraisal beginning with "Shri Krishnavatara Lila" on which I brought out a research paper during the second four-monthly period.

6. "Shri Krishnavatara Lila", which appears to be a 17th or early 18th century work, was transliterated into Roman and translated into English by George Grierson and published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1928. Grierson had acquired its manuscript, which he claimed to be the only complete manuscript of the work, in 1898. I found the transliteration quite defective with a good number of grammatical errors while the translation has been done quite meticulously. Grierson appears to have carried several orthographical errors in the original manuscript on to his transliterated version.

7. There is a lot of confusion about the actual authorship of 'Shri Krishnavatara Lila', the colophon at the end of Grierson's manuscript clearly showing it as having been written by Dina Nath. Grierson is not sure whether Dina Nath is the real name of the author or only a pen-name. He confuses him with the famous Kashmiri devotional poet of the 19th century, Paramanand, who wrote 'Radha Swayamavar', 'Sudama Charit' and 'Shiva Lagna', and also with Prakash Ram Kurigami, the author of 'Shri Ramavatar Charit' whom he calls Diwakar Prakash Bhatta. Grierson also toys with the idea of the existence of two Paramanands. Finding it impossible to make any final statement about the authorship of the work, he leaves it as "a task to future enquirers". Strangely enough, the colophon at the end of Grierson's published version gives the title of the work as 'Shri Krishnavatara Charit' – a title which Autar Krishen Rehbar, Kashmiri writer and scholar, believes to be the original one.

8. In his "History of Kashmiri Literature (Part-I), Rehbar contests Grierson's views about the author's actual name and says that there is another manuscript of the work lying in the library of the Research Department of Jammu and Kashmir

Government in which Sahib Kaul is shown to be its author. Sahib Kaul is a well known Kashmiri Shaiva scholar who has written 'Janma Charit' and 'Kalpavriksha' in Kashmiri and 'Shiva Siddha Nidhi' and 'Devi Vilas' in Sanskrit. One can not be sure whether Rebhar's claim can be relied upon or not in view of the fact that he lacks the knowledge of the Sharada script in which the manuscript is written.

9. It will not be possible to resolve the controversy till the manuscript Rehbar has referred to is thoroughly examined.This, however, would be extremely difficult at present in the disturbed conditions prevailing in the state due to the on-going insurgency. My endeavour shall, however, be to go through this manuscript – if it still exists.

10. "Shri Krishnavatar Lila', is of great literary importance as it has been a very popular poetic work till the early decades of the 20th century. Unfortunately, no one has cared to study the work critically after it was published by Grierson, though some critics have made passing references to it. Based on the tenth *skandha* of the Bhagvata Purana, the author of the work, narrates the life of Krishna, closely following the order of the events given in the original. Grierson has limited himself to a brief discussion of its language and metrics. Mine is the first attempt made by any one at a critical appraisal of "Shri Krishnavatara Lila in the context of the Bhakti tradition in Kashmiri poetry.I have however, proceeded gradually in the matter, and in the first instance made only preliminary observations on it as a work of devotional poetry, with an attempt to briefly touch upon its literary merits and other aspects.

11. I have drawn attention to the fact that Dina Nath's 'Shri Krishnavatara Lila' is the first work in the Kashmiri language to have adopted the exploits of the incarnate Kirshna as its theme. Nearly all the episodes of the tenth *skandha* of the

[illegible] Sahib Kaur [illegible] author Santha Kaur is a well [illegible] Sewa Singh Sekho, who [illegible] written [illegible] and [illegible] in Kashmiri [illegible] Sidhu [illegible] and 'Dev Vilas' [illegible] cannot be [illegible] knowledge of the [illegible] script in which the manuscript is written.

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Bhagvata Purana have been narrated in almost the same order but while some have been dealt with cursorily, others have been described in detail, which points to the poet's own inclinations and proclivities. Thus Krishna's childhood pranks and frolics, his dalliance with the cowherd girls of Vraj, the slaying of Kamsa and the demons sent by him, the coronation of Krishna and the story of Sudama – all feature in the narrative but are treated in a manner which leaves enough scope for the poet Dina Nath to display his artistry and skills.

12. In some of the episodes, the poet has shown flashes of originality and imagination by introducing new elements and giving different twists and turns to the story. While using, Kamsa's traits of tyranny and cruelty to the hilt to portray him as evil, Dina Nath has struck a slightly different note at the end and redeemed his character a little by showing him overcome with remorse and asking Devaki and Vasudeva's forgiveness. Description of Krishna's frolic with Gopa lads has been made all the more interesting by giving it delightful touches of local colour.

13. Krishna's love sport with the Gopis and their irresistible physical attraction for him assumes allegorical dimensions at places, as I have noted. Their union has been interpreted by the poet as union between the individual soul in ecstasy and the supreme spirit.

14. Sudama's and Uddhava's episodes have been sensitively described in 'Shri Krishnavatar Lila', Uddhava's humiliation at the hands of Gopis being particularly moving. All these points have been highlighted by me in my research paper on the work.

15. <u>**Keshav Prakash of Keshav Razdan**</u>

As stated by me in my previous report, I continued my study of Kashmiri Krishna Bhakti poetry during the third four-monthly period, with particular

reference to Keshav Razdan. Though contemporaneous with Krishna Joo Razdan, foremost among Kashmiri Bhakti poets, Keshav Razdan is virtually unknown. Keshav Razdan has written a poetic work bearing the title 'Keshav Prakash' and the sub-title 'Radha Swayamvar' in which he has narrated the traditional story of Radha's nuptial union with Krishna.

16. I got interested in studying Keshav Razdan's work when I found it to be of considerable poetic merit and therefore of significance for my present field of study. The manuscript of the work was lying with writer - scholar Prof. A.N. Dhar, a former head of the post-graduate department of English, Kashmir University, who possessed it as a family heirloom, the author Keshav Razdan being his maternal grandfather. Prof. A.N. Dhar got it published in 1993 only, some twenty years after his mother entrusted him with the prized manuscript written by the author in his own hand in the Persian script.The work was transliterated into Devanagari script and calligraphed by Mr. P.N. Sayal, himself a Kashmiri poet, and then printed through the lithographic process.

17. Prof. Dhar felt "a sense of fulfillment" in getting the work published and tried to attract some attention towards it, but for all his efforts it remains virtually unknown in Kashmiri literary circles today. Only one or two introductory articles have been written on it so far, but it certainly merits a more detailed study and evaluation. I have directed my efforts towards this end and have critically explored its theme in the shape of a research paper titled 'Keshav Prakash of Keshav Razdan: The Radha Swayamvar Theme'. However, I intend to take it up for further literary evaluation in the coming months in the overall context of Krishna Bhakti tradition.

18. Prof. A.N. Dhar has thrown some light on the life of poet Keshav Razdan who, we are informed, was "a learned man, versatile in a number of fields

including painting, astrology and poetry". Well-versed in Persian and Sanskrit, and quite conversant with the Hindu religious texts, he was considered to be a good literary scholar in his times. However, he could not achieve much of a worldly success and had to be content with working as a teacher in a temporary capacity as he was unable to secure a permanent government job.Despite financial insecurity, he managed to maintain himself and his family on his small earnings, and took to writing poetry in Kashmiri on devotional themes whenever he felt inspired. Keshav Razdan came from a respectable Kashmiri Pandit family of Srinagar and lived in the Aga Hamam locality of the city. He passed away probably in 1920 when he was only in his late forties.

19. In addition to "Keshav Prakash", Keshav Razdan has written a number of individual devotional lyrics -- called *lilas* in the Kashmiri language -- which formed a part of the repertoire of professional *bhajan* singers of Kashmir. Prof. A.N. Dhar has, however, lost the original notebook on which the poet had penned these down. In my present study, therefore, I have confined myself to "Keshav Prakash" only, though Prof. Dhar has included some of his other individual compositions also under the same cover.

20. In my study on the work, I have noted that Keshav Razdan did not belong to any particular sect of the Krishna Bhakti cult. Like his great predecessor Parmanand, he has depicted Radha as *svakiya,* or a heroine who is faithful to her husband as her lover, and not as *parakiya,* or a heroine who is the wife of a person other than her lover, as several poets of the Krishna Bhakti cult have portrayed her in other languages. Keshav's work is suffused with a deep devotion for Krishna and is suggestive of the communion between the Supreme Being and Cosmic Energy, *parabrahma* and *shakti,* showing his grasp of Advaita Vedanta. Parmanand too has written a work titled 'Radha Swayamvar', and one cannot say how far it has influenced Keshav Razdan in his choice of the theme. The two

works, however, do not have many things in common and Keshav Razdan does show some flashes of originality and innovative imagination. He has displayed considerable artistic skill in handling the verse narrative which he has written in a beautiful, though simple, language.

21. I have also pointed out in my study that in 'Keshav Prakash', the poet appears to have invested several passages with deeper allegorical meaning in accordance with his own interpretation of the theme. This is more so towards the concluding part of the work where he has given expression to his understanding of the philosophy of Bhakti. The poet sees no difference between Bhakti and Jnana, as both according to him lead to the same goal -- the attainment of *brahmajnana* or the realization of the Supreme Reality. His Shaivite moorings lead him to identify Radha with Shakti and interpret her union with Krishna as the oneness of consciousness that pervades everything. Shakti, or the Cosmic Energy, he says, manifests herself as the phenomenal universe but at the same time remains inseparable from transcendent reality, like the flower and its scent.

22. Keshav Razdan, I have observed, appears to be more concerned about presenting the *aishwarya* or divine majesty of Krishna and Radha, and depicts them everywhere in their grandeur and regal spendour. This is amply reflected in his description of Krishna's marriage procession in which all the gods and goddesses, Apsaras and Gandharvas, kings and potentates make it a point to participate and which is shown more as a dazzling extravaganza than a realistic event. As such, Keshav Razdan does not seem to be interested in the portrayal of human emotions and physical beauty. His characters, therefore, remain more ethereal than creatures of flesh and blood.

23. His greatest asset, however, so far as I have been able to note, is the addition of local colour. This has given an interesting dimension to his

description of the Radha - Krishna marriage, each ceremony and ritual of which has been shown to take place as in a typical Kashmiri mannger.

24. I have also commented on the language of 'Keshav Prakash', but rather briefly.

25. **Paramanand: Devotional Raptures of Krishna Lila**

Paramanad was a poet who led the Bhakti upsurge in Kashmiri poetry in the 19th century. He was also one of the most important literary figures of his time. Yet, not much has been written about him since Master Zinda Kaul brought out the first volume of his selected works in English translation in 1941 under the title 'Paramanand Sukti Sara'. Hardly two or three books comprise the entire bibliography on him, the latest being a critical edition of his complete works brought out by the J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages in 1983 with Motilal Saqi and Prof. S.K. Toshkani as the editors. Earlier, the Academy had published a monograph written by Prof. S.K. Toshkhani on Paramananda, and that remains to this day the only critical work written independently on him. But, the two books mentioned above have not added anything significant to the facts about the poet's life given by master Zinda Kaul in his excellent introduction to 'Paramananda Sukti Sara'. Saqi, Prof. Toshkhani and Prof. Jailal Kaul have separately, evaluated Paramanand's poetry critically after Master Zinda Kaul, but their views, though important, are far from comprehensive. Others have qualified their views by attaching the tag of religious poetry to what be wrote.

26. That a major poet of the Kashmiri language has been disposed off in this manner is, indeed, sad. I have attempted an appraised of Paramanand in my 'Kashmiri Sahitya Ka Itihas'. In my present study I have gone a little further and while having a look at him in the overall context of Bhakti tradition endeavoured

to cover some aspects which had not received my attention earlier. My research paper 'Paramanand : Devotional Raptures of Krishna Lila' is a product of that endeavour.

27. I have regarded the question of chronological ordering of Paramanand's works as only of academic interest. I have tried to analyze the poet's concept of Bhakti as expressed in his three major works, the 'Radha Swayamvar', 'Sudama Charitra' and 'Shiva Lagna' while going strictly by poetic criteria in evaluating their literary merit. It is because of this that I have described some of his miscellaneous poems considered to be of the highest order because of their philosophical or religious content as works of not much literary value. These include poems like the one an Amarnath Yatra which in both Masterji and Prof. Kaul's views represents the highest point of his poetic attainment.

28. Regarding Paramanand's 'Radha Svayamvar'as a masterpiece of devotional poetry, I have tried to identify the elements that makes it so. Paramanand's penchant for allegorisation and suggestiveness in my opinion has been an important factor in distinguishing him as a creative genius. The way he creates parallel worlds of meaning by using the device of word - play and double entendre and thus projects external events as an internal drama ever going on in the mind is to be particularly considered when appraising his works critically. In 'Radha Svayamvar' the allegory unfolds its dimensions from the very beginning with the poet describing Krishna in the Kashmiri Shaiva terms of 'Light' and 'Pure Consciousness'.

29. Paramanand's Radha is a creation of pure beauty and joy. Her image is quite akin to the Radha of Roopa Goswami's 'Ujjvala Nilamani' or the Radha of Chandidas. She has been presented as *svakiya* and not *parakiya,* her love for Krishna representing the intense longing of the human soul for full identification

with God. Like the Gujrati poet Bhalana, Paramanand shows Yashoda eager to make Radha her daughter in-law and looking approvingly at her attraction towards Krishna. Their marriage has been presented by him as the eternal union between Purusha and Prakriti.

30. Celebrating the love between Radha and Krishna in 'Radha Svayamvar', Paramanand has introduced several additions and innovations to the traditional story about their relationship. One of these is the episode showing Krishna sowing pearls and reaping a bumper harvest to make himself acceptable to Radha's parents as her bridegroom. The idea is to show Krishnas *aishvarya* or Lordship as God. Another beautiful innovation is the episode where Krishna stealthily watches Radha bathing and hides her clothes. But his poetic genius flashes forth in all its brilliance when he describes his love - sport with Radha and the Gopis. Like a consummate artist, Paramanand depicts every state of a mind in love in these descriptions but does not let over-sensuousness to overwhelm his imagination while doing so. The erotic sentiment is very much there, but in a sublimated form. This can be seen particularly in the devotional raptures that the Gopis experience while participating in the Rasa Lila. In fact Paramanand himself appears to be immersed in such an experience in his beautiful Rasa songs.

31. Apart form sublimation of erotic love, I have pointed to lyrical intensity as one of the most noteworthy features of 'Radha Svayamvar'. Paramanad seems to be a master in dealing with tender situations which often find expression in songs, which though embedded in the narrative have an appeal of their own. Though pun and word -play are his forte, they can also be seen as an aspect of his sense of verbal music to which he appears to be very sensitive. Some of his songs are in a queer dialect in which an admixture of Kashmiri, Panjabi and Braj Bhasha creates a delightful effect. Interestingly, at one place in the 'Radha

Svayamvar' we find him showing the Gopis praising Krishna perhaps because Hindi to him was the language of Brajabhumi.

32. I have shown Paramananda's 'Sudama Charitra' also to be a work of considerable maturity. The allegory is present here also, unfolding deeper meanings from the beginning. The idea that runs throughout the work is that it is through dissolution of the ego alone that one gains the ability to experience the bliss that comes from God's grace, and it is in trying to communicate this idea that he takes recourse to allegory. Sudama's sufferings have been shown in the work as mainly the outcome of the sense of ego in the individual soul. This sense, according to Paramanand, creates the illusion of man's separateness from God who is otherwise Man's closest companion and friend. This is *sakhya bhakti,* a concept based on the interpretation of relationship between the two as one of friendship. Paramanand shows God (Krishna) as eager to meet Man (Sudama) as Man is to meet God. It is only when *sadbuddhi* (Susheela) prompts the *jiva* or the individual soul that the intention to travel Godwards arises in one's mind.

33. 'Sudama Charitra', I have pointed out in my research paper, does not begin with the story of Sudama and his sufferings, but with the childhood exploits of Krishna which have been described by Paramananad with great sensitivity, almost matching that of Surdas. Sudama's story and his grinding poverty comes in the context of these exploits. Sudama, a playmate of Krishna, looses his innocence the moment he eats his rice secretly without sharing it with Krishna. This has been interpreted as the awakening of the sense of ego, of separate will in his mind which only leads him to absolute misery till Susheela urges him to go to Dwarka, the abode of his childhood friend Krishna – and of liberation for him. When he dissolves his ego and surrenders before Krishna, the feeling of separateness too melts away and his sorrows vanish. Paramanand has interpreted

Krishna's great compassion for Sudama as an endowment of divine grace without which the individual soul cannot free itself from the tangles of ignorance.

34. Paramanand's irresistible tendency to allegorise, however, does not make him forget the human and natural aspects of Sudama's story. Verbal artistry only helps him in suggesting deeper meanings with the help of symbolization. Nowhere does the natural flow of the narrative get choked under the weight of metaphorical expression. Thus, while the reunion of Krishna and Sudama seem to point to communion between the individual soul and the Supreme Being, the heartbeats of Sudama placed in situations of inner conflict, doubt, apprehension, wonder and ecstasy can also be heard distrinctly in 'Sudama Charitra'.

35. 'Shiva Lagna', the third and the last narrative poem composed by Paramanand does have some peculiarites and points of interest, but it does not measure up to 'Radha Svayamvar' and 'Sudama Charitra' in my opinion. The fascination that most Kashmiri Bhakti poets have for the theme of Parvati's penance to obtain Shiva as her husband does not seem to be a mere coincidence. Perhaps it underlines the deep influence of Shaivism on the Kashmiri mind. That is why we see in Paramanand's work a compact of "Vaishnava fervour and Shaiva abandon", as I have observed while concluding my research paper on the poet.

36. **The Ramayana Theme in Kashmiri Literature**

The focus of my study during the fifth four - monthly period was exclusively on 'the Ramayana Theme in Kashmiri Literature'. Familiarity with the Rama story has existed in Kashmir since very early times as is testified by a number of Sanskrit works produced by Kashmiri authors on the theme. There are numerous references and allusions to Ramayana characters and episodes in Kashmiri folklore forms like wedding songs, and songs related to various festive occasions, ballads,

sayings proverbs etc. Surprisingly, however, we do not come across any work on the theme in the Kashmiri language itself before almost mid-19th century.

37. The Nilamata Purana, a sixth century Sanskrit text from Kashmir, clearly refers to Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu, referring to Sita, Lakshmana and Shatrughna also as divinities. It keeps apart a separate festival for the worship of Sita known as the Mahimana festival. The Purana, enjoins upon the people to worship Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita during Krishyarambha, or ceremonious commencement of cultivation.

38. Creative writing in Sanskrit by Kashmiri authors on the Ramayana theme include the 'Ramayanamanjari' of the great 11th century polyglot Kashemendra, a work that runs into 6,400 verses. The work is not a mere abridgement of the Ramayana of Valmiki even though it follows the course of the story as given in the great epic. In another work of his, 'Dashavataracharita', Kshmendra gives an account of Rama's life in 293 verses. Kshemendra has also written a play, 'Kanakajanaki', in which Rama has to do with Sita's golden image for his *ashwamedha yajna* as the real Sita is away in Valmiki's hermitage, exiled by Rama himself. Somadeva in his 'Kathasaritsagara' gives several anecdotes from Rama's life, some of which are not derived from Valmiki but folk versions. Even before Kshemendra or Somadeva, the Kashmiri poet Bhartri Mentha, author of 'Hayagrivavadha', was counted as an author of the Ramayana theme, according to Rajashekhara.

39. Sanskrit aestheticians of Kashmir have also made copious use of the Ramayana, its characters and incidents, to illustrate their concepts and ideas. Ananadavardhana, the propounder of the Dhvani theory, for example, describes in his Dhvanyaloka how *shoka* or sorrow was transformed into *shloka* or verse, alluding to Valmiki. He also expresses himself strongly against taking

indiscriminate liberties with the Ramayana story in the name of innovation. Another great aesthetician from Kashmir, Mammata's famous words *'Ramadivat Vartavyam na tu Ravvanadivat'* - " One should behave like Rama etc. and not like Ravana etc. "have become our national heritage".

40. It is difficult to believe that nothing was written on the Ramayana theme in Kashmiri till the 19th century. The tradition must have existed surely in the poetic literature of the language, even if in a feeble form, but what was written must have been lost due to the political and religious upheavals that took place in Kashmir with the advent of Islam. Yet, it must be admitted that after the establishment of the rule of the Dogra Maharajas, who held Rama as their tutelary deity, the Rama cult took stronger roots in Kashmir, with Kashmiri poets who adopted devotion to Rama, or to Vishnu in general, as the subject matter for their writings, receiving their patronage. Earlier, during the Sikh rule, itinerant Sikh singers played a helpful role in popularizing Bhakti by reciting passages from the Bhagavata and the Ramayana alongside the Granth Sahib. No wonder then that a number of Ramayanas in Kashmiri came up in quick succession in a period of one century, the first of these, the 'Shankar Ramayana', appearing in 1843. The most popular of these was the 'Prakash Ramayana' or the 'Ramavatara Charita' written by Prakash Ram Kurigami, which is the only Kashmiri Ramayana to have appeared in print not just in one but all the three scripts in vogue in Kashmir – Persian, Roman and Devanagari. The last to appear, the 'Amar Ramayana' written by Amar Nath Amar in 1940, introduced contemporary issues like widow marriage and Harijan uplift.

41. The 'Prakash Ramayana', incorporating the 'Ramavatara Charita' and its sequel the 'Lava-Kusha Charita', is a work of tremendous popular appeal. Till recent years, verses from it were sung by enraptured Kashmiri Hindu masses in villages and towns on weddings, sacred thread investiture ceremony and other

such occasions. Its author, Prakash Ram belonged to the small sylvan village of Kurigam, about two or three miles from the town of Qazigund on the Srinagar-Jammu highway. While the original manuscript is in the Persian script, an abridged version of it was prepared by George Grierson in the Roman script and published by the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta in 1930. Grierson, however, wrongly identifies the author with Diwakar Prakash Bhatt, who, he says, flourished during the reign of Raja Sukjiwan Mal (1754-1762). The scribe of the original manuscript has further confounded the confusion by giving its date as 1804 of the Vikram era when it ought to have been 1904 Vikrami which corresponds to 1846 of the Christian era, as shown by later research.

42. That Grierson's version is an abridged one is proved by the fact that it has only 1130 verses against the 2540 verses of the original manuscript in Persian script which was published by the Pratap Steam Press in 1911. In 1965, well-known Kashmiri scholar Dr. B.N. Pandit edited a thoroughly revised text for the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, which it published with his long and well-researched critical introduction. After that two more editions of the text, one prepared by Dr. Omkar Kaul and the other by Dr. Shibban Krishan Raina, came up, with Hindi translation, in the mid - 1970's carrying the research on the subject further.

43. 'Prakash Ramayana' has been described by some critics as "the first Razmia Masnavi" (war poem) of Kashmiri. I find myself in strong disagreement with this view. Neither in its style or structure nor in its spirit can 'Prakash Ramayana' be called a Masnavi, though it has borrowed some elements from the genre. It is, as its title suggests, a '*charita kavya*' or a narrative poem describing the acts and exploits of a hero, who in this case happens to be a divine person, Rama. As in the Rama-charita-manasa, the story has been presented as a dialogue between Shiva and Parvati. Devotion dominates the work from the beginning to

the end and its propagation seems to be the basic goal of the poet who holds it to be the only path to salvation. He has also tried to give the story an allegorical interpretation while explaining in the beginning what he calls "the meaning of Ramayana" and projecting it as a struggle between the forces of "truth and falsehood" that takes place eternally inside the human mind. Structurally, 'Prakash Ramayana' is divided into seven *kandas* – Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Kishkindhya Kanda, Sundar Kanda, Yuddha Kanda, and Uttar Kanda. The narrative is further arranged under sub-titles denoting the various high points of the story. The 'Lava-Kusha Charita' has not been designated as a Kanda, but added as a kind of epilogue at the end. The metre chosen for narration is *bahar-i hajaz,* a Persian metre used in Masnavis, while the lyrics and devotional songs are in the Kashmiri *vatsan* style.

44. A distinctive feature of the 'Prakash Ramayana' is that even though it is inspired by the classical Ramayanas, its narrative has been rendered in folk diction giving literary form to colloquial speech. This, along with the songs and lyrics, has given it the peculiar charm of a folk-epic. The introductory ballad *"Rama-Lakhyman avatari dray"* (Rama and Lashmana have incarnated themselves on the earth) said to have been later incorporated in the text endorses this point.

45. Another important factor that explains its phenomenal popularity is profusion of local colour. At times it appears that the poet has placed his narrative in a typically Kashmiri setting presenting captivating pictures of Kashmiri social life and natural environment. Thus we find Kashmir's seasons descending on Lanka and its trees shading and surrounding Sita in the Ashokavana where Ravana had confined her. There are numerous references to the melting of the snow and the advent of spring with Kashmiri birds singing to herald it. Rama's marriage to Sita appears to be a pure Kashmiri Hindu wedding with all its rites and rituals

and ceremonies. Even some characters' names have been given according to their Kashmiri pronunciation.

46. Though Prakash Ram broadly follows the course of the story given in the Valmiki Ramayana it is the several variations, additions and innovations he introduces that provide a glimpse of his imagination and creative genius. There are some episodes which he has altogether dropped, some he has cut short, while some he has described in new details. It is indeed an extraordinary Ramayana, unique in many ways in which Ravana has been depicted as Sita's father, showing an Oedipus tangle at the root of the struggle with demoniac forces. And unlike any other Ramayana, it shows Sita revolting against the injustice meted out to her. Towards the end, she shuts herself up in Valmiki's hermitage and refuses to open the door for a Rama imploring her to return with him, recapitulating all the wrongs he had done to her. I have studied all these variations in detail, deriving my own conclusions from them and at places shedding a new light on them. Some of these like the Mahiravana episode are very significant. This episode links the 'Prakash Ramayana' to the Khotanese and other Central Asian versions, the Rama - story having gone to these regions from Kashmir itself among other places. Uniquely Kashmiri is the story about Hanumana's chance encounter with Makardhwaja and the emotional drama it unfolds as he turns out to be the great simian warrior's own son. Another uniquely interesting episode is about the Makkeshwara *linga*, which I feel only a Kashmiri could think of. While discussing this episode, I have referred to the deep influence that 'Prakash Ramayana' has left on the other Ramayanas written in the Kashmiri language and also to the features that all these Ramayanas share with it.

47. Though the concept of *avatara* and *lila* must have left him with little scope for characterization, and despite his attempt at allegorical interpretation, Prakash Ram has shown great skill in balancing the divine and human traits of his

characters. One great quality that I find in him is that with all his devotion for Rama, he has not painted any character as totally white and another as totally black. Even Ravana with all his wickedness has been shown as a great devotee of Shiva and an outstanding scholar and not entirely vile as others have depicted him. In fact, we can discern in him shades of Milton's Satan. On the other hand, even divine characters like Rama have been shown behaving questionably. In Prakash Ramayana we have a Sita who revolts against the injustices done to her, a Hanuman who while personifying courage and valour reveals the tender side of his heart in the Makardhwaja episode, a Mandodari who is full of affectionate feelings for Sita, a Ravana who looks tragic in his dying moments. And all the main characters are placed by the author in situations in which they have to take crucial decisions and make unequivocal moral choices.

48. I do not subscribe to the view of scholars like Dr. B.N. Pandit and Abdul Ahad Azad who find 'Prakash Ramayana' lacking in poetic merit except showing some flashes here and there. True there are some bland spots and some sensitive episodes have been dealt with rather cursorily, but there are also many places where the poet's creative and imaginative genius shines forth quite brilliantly. Prakash Ram's narrative skills is captivating, his description of nature and human emotions is impressive and at times quite beautiful. His depiction of Sita's tragedy moves one to tears.

49. After a detailed assessment of the 'Prakash Ramayana', I have analyzed some features of other Kashmiri Ramayanas also, though in brief. Though 'Prakash Ramayana' surpasses them all, and has influenced most of them, these Ramayanas too have their individual merit which has generally been overlooked – mainly because they are in manuscript form only and, therefore, not easily accessible to the common reader. They need to be published and worked upon, but this is rather difficult owing to the present circumstances prevailing in

Kashmir. Their manuscripts are supposed to be lying with the descendents of their authors, but nothing is sure. I, however, have gone through these while I was writing my History of Kashmiri Literature. As pointed out earlier, these Ramayanas have a number of features in common to which I have referred at the end of my research paper 'The Ramayana Theme in Kashmiri Literature'.

50. **<u>The Concept of Bhakti in Krishna Joo Razdan</u>**

I have concluded my study of 'The Bhakti Tradition in Kashmir Poetry', with an analysis of the concept of Bhakti in Krishnajoo Razdan. A great poetic genius who represents the final upsurge of devotional Shaivism, Krishana Joo Razdan is the most musical of Kashmir poets, high acoustic values forming the mainstay of his tremendous appeal. Like Lalleshwari, his spiritual experience translates itself into soul-stirring poetry, touching the borders of mysticism which has its antecedents in Utpalacharya and Bhatta Narayana. But while Lalleshwari upholds the philosophy of absolute non - dualism between God and Man, Krishna joo Razdan correlates belief in a personal God and an impersonal view of the Ultimate Reality.

51. Living in an age when the horrors and holocausts of the Afghan rule in Kashmir were still haunting the racial memory of Kashmir Hindus even though the state had passed into the hands of the Dogras, Krishna joo Razdan sought comfort in a benign and compassionate God who protects the pious and upholds the cosmic order. He was thus very much a product of the socio-political and intellectual climate of his times. I have referred to this aspect in my study as influencing his sensibility as a poet and also his concept of Bhakti as a compensating factor

52. Krishna joo Razdan, I have pointed out, places Bhakti above everything else in life as to him it is instrumental in grasping the Ultimate Reality. For him

Bhakti is a *bhava* or a state of mind, and emotion rather than an intellectual response to the problems of existence. It is a prized possession as valuable as a string of pearls, for it helps to please God and satisfy one's spiritual craving to feel His presence. God, he believes, is someone unto whom one can surrender, and whom one can love and depend upon for deliverance from the miseries of the world.

53. But the search for God is not easy and smooth — it requires great discipline of mind and involves unbearable pain and anguish of separation from Him. Krishna joo Razdan emphasizes the importance of complete surrender to God's will as a pre-requisite for Bhakti in his sweet and mellifluous Rasa songs, which also points to the raptures of union with Him. Krishna joo Razdan does not believe in intellectualizing devotion, his concept of Bhakti is centred in emotion and feeling, as I have pointed out in my study. He understands it as cultivation of an emotional relationship with God, but even as he lays stress on *bhava* or feeling, he views *jnana* or knowledge in conjunction with it. He does not find any antagonism between *bhakti* and *jnana*, which he thinks go hand in hand. Steering clear of controversial theorizations, he adopts an attitude that is based on the Bhagvad Gita in which Krishna explains that knowledge is essential for Bhakti. In this context I have noted with interest that Razdan has devoted an entire poem to describe the traits of a Jnani Bhakta.

54. I have also pointed to the relationship between *bhakti*, *jnana* and *mukti* as it emerges in the poetry of Krishna joo Razdan in this context. I have referred to the concept of *shaktipata* to which Razdan makes frequent reference as it has been explained in the Shaiva philosophy of Kashmir. According to Shaiva thinkers, *shaktipata* or divine grace is essential for *moksha*, which Krishna Razdan considers to be the highest goal and greatest attainment of life. He calls it *anugraha*, and says that it is "the root of the tree of self-realization". And to

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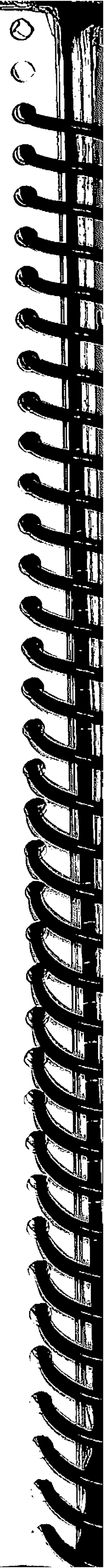
receive *anugraha*, he joins the Vaishnava Acharyas in saying that one has to dissolve the ego and surrender to God completely, as that alone gives one the capacity to love Him. The Acharyas call love the *ahladini shakti* or the "joy – giving power" of Krishna Himself, and say that it can be obtained only after breaking the ego and merging the self with the Supreme Consciousness. In the Shaiva view also, Shakti becomes Bhakti for the purpose of liberation.

55. Another point that I have stressed is that Krishna joo Razdan does not find any incompatibility between belief in a personal and determinate God and the idea of an impersonal and monistic view of reality. He himself chooses Shiva and Krishna as his personal deities, but while drirecting his love and emotion towards them, identifies them with *nirguna* and *nirakara brahma*. Bhakti, he believes, results in a feeling of oneness with the object of its contemplation. I have shown how in his poetic philosophy he stresses the fact that reality expresses itself in different forms, all the forms being manifestations of one and the same Reality. In his poems he repeatedly points out that no duality exists between Shiva, Krishna and other deities. His magnum opus, 'Shiva Lagna' is replete with such references.

56. Equating Shiva and Krishna with *nirguna brahma*, he says in 'Shiva Lagna' that the one transcendent divinity reveals itself as Self-Luminous Reality, using the Shaiva metaphors of *prakasha* and *vimarsha* (light and self-consciousness). Unfortunately, I think, the Shaiva concepts of Bhakti and Shiva Bhakti have been ignored and marginalized by Vaishnava Acharyas in their theorization of Bhakti. This is not the case in Kashmir, where Shiva Bhakti is no doubt the dominant strain, but Vaishnava traditions have also been given an important place.

57. I have concluded my study by pointing to some of the definitions of Bhakti propounded by Shaiva thinkers like Abhinavagupta and Ramakantha in which

they stress the complete identity of the individual soul with the Absolute, Krishna joo Razdan too, I have shown, seems to uphold the view that immediate experience of the absolute non-dualism itself is the highest devotion in his 'Shiva Lagna' which has the unity of Shiva and Shakti for its theme.



RESEARCH PAPERS

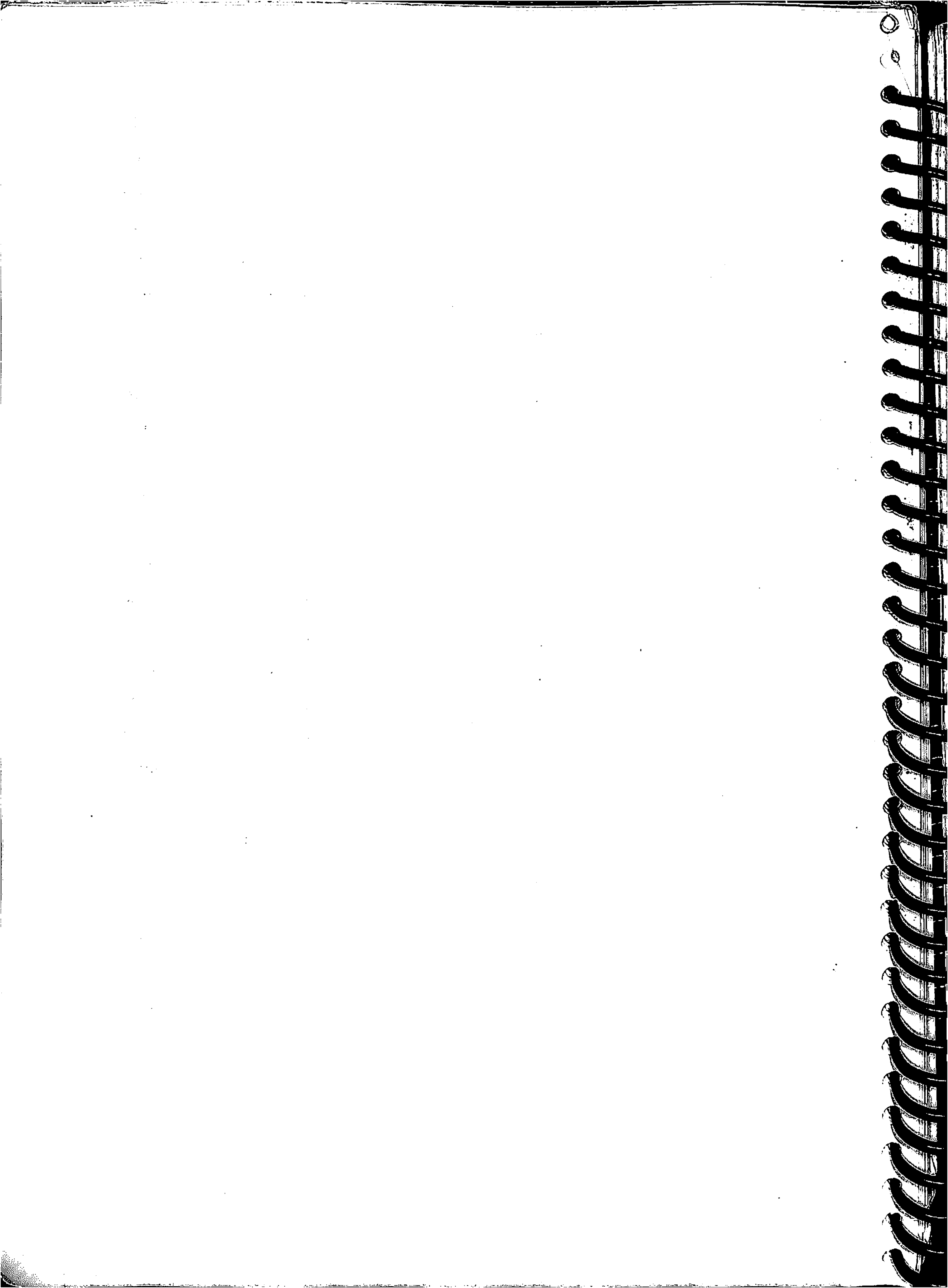
1. BEGINNINGS OF BHAKTI IN KASHMIR

Bhakti as a movement originated in South India where it formed its basic conceptions and beliefs, absorbing and assimilating elements from various traditions and theological systems and transforming these into an entirely new vision of the relationship between God and man. From there it swept across the whole of India from one corner to another with its emphasis on inwardness of experience instead of external ceremony, on undivided love for God instead of ritual orthodoxy, on worship as a personal relationship instead of dogma. In his book 'Hymns for Drowning', A.K. Ramanujan has described Bhakti as a "great many-sided shift in Hindu culture and sensibility." This "shift" found its earliest expression in the poetry of the Alvars — Tamil saint-poets who lived between the sixth and ninth century and were devoted to Vishnu, the *vachanas* of medieval Kannada Virshaiva poets forming the next expression of Bhakti in an Indian language. These early Bhakti poems expressing feeling of personal devotion to God have been described as "lyrical expression of love", intensely personal and impassioned and, therefore, having a direct and powerful emotional appeal. Soon other languages and regions followed. To quote A.K. Ramanujan again, "Like a lit fuse, the passion of Bhakti poems .... spread from region to region, from century to century, quickening the religious impulse".

Like Kabir of the Hindi region, and Chaitanya of Bengal, Kashmir too was submerged by the Bhakti wave. The first heartbeats of Bhakti in Kashmir poetry can be heard in the *vaaks* or verse sayings of Lalleshwari, the celebrated saint-poetess who lived in the 14th century. She had before her the precedent of Bhatta Narayana (9th century) and Utpaldeva (end of ninth and first half of tenth century), both outstanding poets and important representatives of devotional Shaivism. Both of them advocated the path of love as the highest path to reach Shiva. There is one

distinction, however, that has to be kept in mind before one talks about the models their "love poems" addressed to Shiva provided for Lalleshwari : they wrote exclusively in classical Sanskrit whereas Lalleshwari or LaL Ded chose colloquial Kashmiri – and this difference is extremely significant. Another point that has to be noted is that the works of these three major poets of devotional triadism represent only the first phase of Bhakti upsurge in Kashmir and that like the Vachana poetry of Kannada Virshaiva poets, this phase is exclusively devoted to Shiva. In fact it is Shaivism that binds Kashmir and South India together in one great spiritual bond.

This is not to suggest that no other bonds exist. Devotion to Vishnu also formed an equally significant Bhakti experience for Kashmir in that early medieval period. An important but relatively unknown fact is that one of the earliest Bhakti saints who lived in the Tamil speaking regions was from Kashmir. We do not know whether this particular saint-poet maintained any links with the land of his origin or not, but it is said of Bhakti saints that they were great integrators. They traveled from one place to another and across the regions, to claim adherents and find kindred spirits. The possibility of this saint having visited Kashmir, the land of his origin, can not be ruled out. This will be an interesting point to explore. If he did, he surely must have influenced the minds of people there and introduced them to some of the ideas expressed by him in his poems. While this is something on which light has still to be shed, there exists a significant corpus of Sanskrit works written in Kashmir describing the exploits of Vishnu in his various incarnations and expressing devotion to him. The 'Ramayana Manjari', 'Mahabharata Manjari' and 'Dashavatara Varnana' of Kshemendra, who lied in 11th century Kashmir, are some examples of such works. We shall discuss this later, but at the same time we would like to point out that it was only towards the 18th and 19th century that poetry devoted to Vishnu formed a distinct and significant trend in Kashmiri. This can be regarded as the second phase of the Bhakti movement in Kashmir and there



were definite political and cultural reasons for its emergence which have hardly been studied. The fact is that Kashmiri Bhakti poetry has so far remained at the periphery of critical attention for reasons other than academic. We shall discuss both the phases of Bhakti movement in Kashmiri separately. These can be broadly distinguished as *nirguna* and *saguna* forms of Bhakti, or devotion to a God without attributes and to a God with attributes. This distinction is important to note for the study of the these two traditions.

In Kashmir, the early monistic Shaiva poet's God was *nirguna*, attributeless, without form and impersonal. Although He may bear the name Shiva, He is not the Shiva of mythology, as the triadic or Trika philosophy, as Kashmir Shaiva system is generally known, "does not adhere to a personal God, that is to a God whose subsistent individuality is emphasized over and above His conscious or intellegential nature". The name Shiva or Parama Shiva (Supreme Shiva) that he gave to Him connotes a non-personal entity — the Ultimate Reality. Yet He is the supreme consciousness whose manifestations are "separated from the self as reflected external objects are from a mirror". As it is difficult to relate personally and passionately to an impersonal or non-personal God, the poet realizing that he and the entire manifested universe is Shiva, envisages a personal aspect of Him linked to His manifestations. This is the case with all the three major representatives of devotional Shaivism — Bhatta Narayana. Utpaldeva and Lal Ded. All of them display a sense of harmony between rigrous metaphysical thought and deep emotional experience, self-awareness and mystical fervour. gnosticism and love. For them Bhakti or devotion means ~~an~~ immense love and adoration for God, not as a means to any end but as the highest end itself. We do not, however, find the term Bhakti as such being used by Vasugupta, the founder of the Self-Awareness school of Kashmir Shaivism. During his period devotionalism was not systematized in Kashmir. The era of devotion followed the era of gnosticism in Shaiva philosophy of which the greatest representative was

Abhinavagupta. It was Bhatta Narayana, Vasugupta's direct disciple and successor, who was the first poet of devotional Shaivism in Kashmir. He wrote the 'Stava Chintamani', or the 'Wishing Jewel of Praise', "a love poem of 120 verses", whose main theme is the union of Shiva and Shakti under the form of Light and Self-Awareness — Prakasha and Vimarsha. Bhatta Narayana worships Shiva as the compassionate God, the dispenser of universal grace and his only refuge whom he clenches and holds in his fist. Playing the role of the true devotee, Bhatta Narayana "thirsts for the nectar of undifferentiation". "Whatever bliss is to be found in all of the three worlds", he says, " is only a drop from the ocean of bliss that is the God (Shiva) to whom I bow down".

Bhatta Narayana is followed by Utpaladeva (9th century) whose 'Shivastotravali' ('The Series of Hymns to Shiva') is said to be "the most beautiful of Shaiva love songs". He expresses himself in an impassioned form of devotional verse written in a personal and touching style. For him, he asserts, there is no greater suffering than the experience of separation from Shiva: 'Pain is separation from You, and joy is union with You". This separation has produced "wounds of the heart", which are unbearable to him. This is an inexpressible torment which only the mystics know "who are used to ecstasy" and whose "hearts overflow with love". Describing the feeling Utpala says : "Even if I am separated from You for only a moment, O Lord, soon, I consume myself with torments. Remain, therefore, always visible".

Coming to Lalleshwari or Lal Ded, or Lalla as she is simply called, we can say that she combines both the speculative and mystic tendencies in her verses called *vaaks*. The roots of her mysticism do not lie in a supposed Sufi influence that is foisted upon her but in the tradition of triadic devotionalism exemplified in the works of Bhatta Narayana and Utpaldeva. She is without doubt the most popular

Abhinavagupta. It was [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] successor, who was the first [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] "Siva's Chintamani [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] verses" whose main theme is the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] Light and Self-Awareness [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] Siva as the compassionate God, the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] beings whom He creates and holds [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] Bhatta Narayana "hymns" for the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] be found in all of the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] other than the God [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

ii

Bhatta Narayana is followed by Utpaladeva (10th century) [illegible] [illegible] "The Series of Hymns to Siva" [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]. [illegible] [illegible] in an [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] and touching style. [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] than the experience of [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] he is united with You [illegible] always [illegible]

[illegible] [illegible]

among the Shaiva devotional poets and has influenced Kashmiri psyche more deeply than anyone else.

It was after a gap of nearly 500 years after Bhatta Narayana and Utpaldeva that Lal Ded appeared on the scene as the greatest Shaiva poetess of Kashmir. It is difficult to believe that Shaiva philosophy which held such great sway over people's minds in Kashmir would not have inspired any poetic work worth mentioning during this long interval of time. But all that we have in the name of Kashmiri literature in this early era of its development are just two works – the 'Chhummā Sampradaya' verses which can be dated to the 11th century, and the 'Mahanaya Prakasha' which can be assigned to the 13th century. Both these works concern esoteric practices and doctrines of Shaiva and Tantric sects. There is nothing in them that can be regarded as poetry despite their having been composed in verse. Nor do we find in them anything remotely devotional. Yet it would not be far-fetched to assume that the Shaiva devotional current in Kashmiri poetry kept flowing as a sub-terranian stream up to Lal Ded's time.

Lal Ded's *vaaks* show that the mystic strain in her poetry combines her quest for gnostic illumination with the depth of her emotional experience. Paul E. Murhy calls her the chief exponent of devotional or emotion-oriented triadism, and rightly so. In her verses we see her setting out in the quest of Shiva and yearning intensely for union with Him. They show her frustration at losing the direction and at the same time the strengthening of her determination to find Him and possess Him. Like Utpala, she talks of the intensity of her anguish and writhes with the pain of separation. She realizes that a total surrender of her ego alone shall lead her to her cherished goal. She describes the ecstasy of this final union in images and metaphors which are stunningly beautiful :

> I, Lalla, set out with burning longing
> And seeking, searching, passed the day and night

Till lo, I saw to mine own house belonging
The Pandit, and seized my luck and star of light
(Tr: Nila Cram Cook)

I came by the highway
But by the highway I did not return
And I found myself stranded halfway on the embankment
With the light of the day gone
Searching my pockets a penny I did not find
What shall I pay now to the ferryman as fare?

Through the gate of the garden of my mind
I, Lalla, entered, and lo what joy!
I saw Shiva united with Shakti there
And became immersed in the lake of nectar
Now, what can death do unto me?

Recording her own mystical life in her verses, Lal Ded shares with Utpala and Bhatta Narayana a sharp feeling of the immediate presence of Shiva, the Divine Being. The poetry of all the three stems from an intense resignation to the divine will, and reflects their vivacity, originality and deep sincerity. There is a striking similarity in many of their passages which can be compared for their "emotions. intoxications and sufferings and the metaphors and images that express these. For instance, Utpala in his mystic ardour and with a mind inflamed by powerful longing approaches Shiva, to attain communion with him and clenching Him with an impassioned very holds him in his fist:

'Here you are, I hold You in my fist! Here you are, live seen you.
Where are you fleeing?"

(Stavachintamani)

This has a perfect parallel in Lalleshwari. She evokes almost the same image in this expression of hers:

> I diffused outside the light that lit up within me.
> And in that darkness I seized him and held Him tight!

Image and metaphors relating to the concept of Shiva's self- luminosity abound in Shaiva devotional poets, and the "darkness" that Lal Ded refers to is the dark Mystical Night of anguish and suffering which ultimately leads to the "Night of Undifferentiateness".

The first step in this "mystical progression is", according to Silvia Silburn, "self-annihilation or destruction of all doubt and dualism, and the culmination is communion with the divine which, in Shaiva terminology, is self-realization of one's Shiva nature, a stage in which nothing remains but Shiva-consciousness – '*somy su ta boh nikenh*' ("The Lord is everything and I am nothing!").

The ultimate mystical self-realization in Lal Ded, therefore, means absorption in Shiva:

> In seeking 'me' and 'Thee' I passed the day
> Absorbed within Thyself thou hadst remained
> Concealed from me! I wandered far away
> When I beheld Thee in myself, I gained
> For Thee and me that rapture unrestrained.
>
> (Trs: Nila Cram Cook)



But though the antecedents of Lal Ded's Bhakti can be traced in the Shaivite mysticism of Ulpala and Bhatta Narayana, Shaivism provides only the metaphysical framework within which her poetry can be studied. Through her verses she brought the essence of Kashmir Shaivism within the reach of all, the path of Bhakti for her being the means of attaining liberation. "It is not just a simple attitude and an unthinking act of faith", to put it the words of Krishna Sharma which she has used in the context of Kabir's concept of Bhakti, "but is a reasoned and individual act of spiritual striving". That is why we find her scathing in her attack on outer ceremony and hollow ritual in religion, her emphasis being on inner experience. She ridicules those who believe in "sacred places and sacred times", pilgrimages and fasts which to her were mere "orthodox ritual genuflections" to borrow an expression from A.K. Ramanujan. She expresses her strong abhorrence for animal sacrifice and detests idol workshop. She must have surely provoked the orthodoxy with the pot - shots which she never missed a chance to take, but she took the sharp criticism leveled at her for her unorthodox ways in its stride:

Let them hurl thousands of abuses at me
I will not entertain any grievance in my heart
If I be a true devotee of Shankar
Ashes, after all, cannot soil the mirror!

Here she unambiguously affirms her status as a Bhakta of Shankara or Shiva. and it is as this devotee, she asserts, that she does not take praise or abuse to heart. This assertion by her is significant for it also defines her concept of Bhakti – something that makes her rise above praise or condemnation by people. Indeed it is her deep spiritual humanism, the existential anguish that she felt while reflecting on the human condition that made her define her relationship with God. Her Bhakti can be understood only in the context of love – love that sears the heart:



My heart I parched as farmers parch the grain
And from that fire there came a wondrous boon
And Shiva in a flash I did obtain

(Trs: Nila Cram Cook)

Surely if Bhakti can described as the rejection of "otherness" of God, then Lal Ded's verses are suffused with devotional fervour.

It is rather strange, that Shaivism and Shiva - Bhakti have been ignored in all accounts and theorizations of Bhakti, mostly by medival Vaishnava Acharyas who have identified it with Vaishnava traditions alone. The devotional current represented by Lal Ded has its source of inspiration in Kashmir Shaivism which does not believe in a personal God but is based on the idea of complete identification of the individual self with universal consciousness. It can be understood as Bhakti only in the generic and not any sectarian sense of the term. Lal Ded or Lalleshwari's Shiva is not the Puranic Shiva to whom devotion can be directed as a personal deity but an epithet for the Ultimate Reality which is both transcendent and immanent. He is not what Krishna was to Mira, and cannot be viewed in conjunction with *saguna* or determinate God with whom He is incompatible. This difference rooted in her concept of Shaiva non-dualism must be essentially noted while studying her as a devotional poet.

But perhaps one of the greatest statements that Lal Ded makes in her verses is through her choice of language. Instead of using the classical language of the learned tradition, Sanskrit, she uses colloquial Kashmiri of her times, the spoken language of the common people. Such linguistic preference, it must be noted, is shared by poets of all other regional Bhakti movements too. Kashmiri at that time was just emerging from the stage of a spoken regional dialect to become a modern Indo-Aryan language like Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Punjabi, Assamese

etc. which did not have a literary form till at least the 9th –10th century. A.K. Ramanujan has drawn our attention to the linguistic and political reasons for this relation between language development and Bhakti which depended on the local. vernacular traditions for expression. This was, in fact, one of the definitive elements of Bhakti poetry throughout India. Sanskrit was the language of culture of the elite, of the learned few or even an inter - provincial link language, but the regional language was "the language of nature", the first language which is "continuous with the language of one's earliest childhood and family, one's local folk and folklore". It enlarged the reach of the poets, enhanced the range of their appeal and also ensured their popularity. Surely, the use of Kashmiri by Lal Ded as her medium of expression was responsible for her immense popularity with the masses. She talked to them directly in their workaday language, taking her images and metaphors from their everyday experiences.

The second upsurge of Bhakti movement in Kashmir was mainly Vaishnavite in character. Poets who wrote in this tradition sang praises of Vishnu as their personal God, particularly in his incarnation as Rama and Krishna. While this was a late development which took place in the 18th -19th century, its ground had been prepared as far back as the 10th-11th century or even earlier when the concepts of Ishtadeva (personal God), Avatara (incarnation) and Lila (divine play) took shape. According to Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, the tradition of singing devotional verses celebrating Krishna's exploits, which was prevalent in Bengal and Orissa during the 10th-11th century, was also common in "distant places like Kashmir". That is, such songs were current in the whole of India "from east to west". Obviously the tradition of such devotional lyrics in Kashmir must have been a long one just as in other parts of the country. These lyrics celebrated both local and trans-local gods besides incarnations of Vishnu whose worship had started in the country right from the time of the Gupta kings who prided in calling themselves *bhagavatas* or devotees of Vishnu. They made worship of Vishnu and his incarnations almost a

state concern. It was in their time that different texts of Hindu mythology were finally given a concrete shape and were compiled as Puranas. The Krishna cult emerged in the later Gupta period providing a full scenario for enactment of Krishna Lila in poetry. In Kashmir too Lalitaditya and Avantivarman were great patrons of art and literature like the Gupta kings. During their reigns Kashmir reached the pinnacle of its political and cultural glory with its impact lingering on for several centuries to come. They built temples dedicated to both Shiva and Vishnu, sculpted icons and patronized the Sanskrit language. As a consequence of these developments, devotion for Vishnu overflowed into celebratory songs.

Coming to Kshemendra again we find that a century before Jayadeva wrote his famous 'Dashavatara' hymn in Gita Govinda, the Kashmiri polyglot had already composed his 'Dashavatara Varnana' to describe the exploits of the ten heroic incarnations of Vishnu. At one place in this work Kshemendra writes about the pangs of separation suffered by the *gopis* after Krishna left Gokula for Mathura. He made the *gopis* sing a beautiful song on the banks of the river to express their state of mind. The song, as quoted by Hazari Parasad Dwivedi in his "Hindi Sahitya ka Adikkal", is as follows:

Lalita vilas kala sukha khelana
Lalana lobhan shobana yauvana
Manita nava Madane

Alikula kokila kuvalaya kajjala
Kala kalindasuta vigalajjal
Kaliya kula damane

Keshakishor mahasura marana
Daruna Gokula durita vidarana
Govardhana harane

Kasya na nayana yugam ratisangye
Majjati manasija tarala tarange
Vararamani ramane

It can be presumed, writes Dwivedi, that Kshemendra had heard such songs in his neighbourhood. Writing a Dashavatara hymn must have become a convention which has been followed by Jayadeva also. Interestingly, Kshemendra has mentioned the name of Radha in his 'Dashavatara Charit', and so has Anandavardhana, the great Kashmir aesthete of the 10^{th} century. Why, we find even our old Bhatta Narayana mentioning her name in one of the verses of his well-known play 'Veni Samahara':

Kalindya pulineshu kelikupitam utsrijya rase rase
Gachchhantim - anugachchatro'tra
Kalusham Kamadvisho Radhikam

All this proves that in the 9^{th}-10^{th} century itself not only had Radha's name become familiar to poets in Kashmir but such descriptions must have surely paved the way for the upsurge of Vaishnava Bhakti in the whole of north India. It also suggests that a distinct tradition of composing Bhakti lyrics devoted to Krishna, and also Rama must have existed in the regional dialect of Kashmir. Although this tradition blossomed into a full-fledged trend only in the 18^{th} -19^{th} century with the arrival of poets like Paramanand, Prakash Ram Kurigami and Krishna joo Razdan, it must have continued, however feebly, in the intervening centuries too. The tradition though was interrupted to a great extent during the Muslim rule, if not obliterated altogether.

It is important to point out here that their Bhakti poems link Kashmir to the perennial mainstream of Indian literary tradition. Kashmiri Bhakti poetry may not have had the privilege of great theologists like Ramanujam to provide it with a philosophical underpinning, but there were surely scholars like Pandit Keshav Bhatta Kashmiri who played an important role in interpreting the doctrines of the Nimbarka sect. The Kashmiri Bhakti poets, however, did not align themselves

with any sect or school as such. They borrowed freely from what A.K. Ramanujan calls the 'pan-Indian pool of symbology'. They shared with other poets of northern and southern Bhakti traditions a common stock of myths. legends, motifs, metaphors, images, symbols and figures, which showed that they had their roots deep in the Indian tradition. It is with this background that we can produced to study various aspects of the two phases of the Bhakti moment in Kashmir.

2. 'SHRI KRISHNAVATAR LILA' - A PRELIMINARY APPRAISAL

If the first upsurge of devotional poetry in Kashmiri was inspired by Shaiva philosophical thought, its second phase had devotion to Rama and Krishna, incarnations of Vishnu, as its motivating spirit. At a time when the literary scene in Kashmir was completely dominated by the Persian language and Persian poetry and was finding its expression in Masnavis and romantic Ghazals, the fact that a section of poets turned to the Bhakti movement of North India for inspiration is in itself significant. Not only did it help Kashmiri maintain its links with the Indian literary tradition, it also opened new horizons of possibilities for creativity in the language. This, however, was not a sudden development. Behind it was consciousness of a spiritual and cultural value-system which had acquired momentum even before the celebrated 14th century saint-poetess Lalleshwari appeared on the scene. What happened actually was that the historical, social and cultural situation prevailing in the Valley from the 17th to the 19th century provided reasons for a devotion-centred poetry to take a definite shape.

Even in the 15th century, Avtar Bhatt composed a poetic work of haunting beauty titled 'Banasur Katha' which was related to the Krishna legend, though not exactly inspired by devotional feelings. Its theme revolves round the love story of Usha, Banasura's daughter, and Aniruddha, Krishna's grandson, in which Krishna appears as a divine super-hero and subdues the demon Banasura, strengthening his image of the destroyer of the demons and deliverer of the earth. Devotion, however, is not the main theme of 'Bansasur Katha', but depiction of love and war in which Avtar Bhatt has shown great mastery as a poet, presenting as he does the physiology and psychology of erotic love in a most beautiful manner. So, despite being related to Krishna and his lore, 'Banasur Katha' cannot be considered to be a religious or devotional work. The first poetic work in which Krishna figures as Vishnu incarnate from the devotional point of view is 'Shri

Krishnavatar Lila' attributed by George Grierson to a virtually unknown poet named Dina Nath. Grierson claims to have procured the single manuscript of the work in 1898 which, he says, "is the only complete copy I have seen". He got the work published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1928, but he refrains from calling it a critical edition of the text, preferring to describe it "merely as a good specimen of the comparatively little-known Kashmiri language".

Taking the help of a Kashmiri scholar, Mahamahopadhyaya Mukund Ram Shastri, Grierson got a Sanskrit rendering of it prepared. On the basis of this rendering, he himself translated it into Engish, transliterating the text into the Roman characters according to the "fixed norms" laid by Ishwar Kaul for spelling Kashmiri words in Nagari or Sharada character. The transliteration is, however, defective with quite a number of Kashmiri words appearing to be wrongly spelt and grammatically incorrect. Ironically, Grierson calls it "a good specimen of correct Kashmiri". But so far as the English translation of the work is concerned, Grierson seems to have done a thoroughly meticulous job. Grierson quotes the colophon of his manuscript of the work in which the author's name is clearly given as "Dinanatha":

iti kashmirika-dinanatha rachitam
shri krishnavatara charitam samaptam

Strangely, the name of the work is given here as "Shri Krishnavatara Charitam" and not "Shri Krishnavatara Lila", probably because of scribal error. Though the name "Dinanatha" given in the colophon leaves no room for any ambiguity, Grierson seems to be doubtful about its authenticity. In verse 1172 as well, the author has referred to himself as "Dyun", but Grierson feels that this is only a pen-name and "his real name is nowhere disclosed". In the confusion of his mind, Grierson believes that the author's actual name could have been Paramanand (the famous author of 'Radhaswayamvar' and 'Sudamacharit').

"who is said to have died in 1822", or else he was the same person as Prakash Ram of Kurigam or "Divakara-Prakasha Bhatta", the author of 'Shri Ramavatara Charit'. Grierson even toys with the idea that there could have been two Parmanands. Not being able to reconcile "all these mutually inconsistent traditions", he finds it impossible to make any statement regarding the author of the work, "save that his pen-name was Dina - natha". And so he leaves his identification as "a task to future enquirers". Autar Krishen Rehbar, however, ascribes the work to Sahib Kaul (b. 1629), a Shaiva scholar and author of 'Janma Charit' and 'Kalpavriksha' in Kashmiri, besides 'Devi Vilas' and 'Shiva Siddha Niti' in Sanskrit. According to him, there is another manuscript of 'Shri Krishnavatar Charit' lying in the library of the Research Department, Kashmir which Grierson published as 'Shri Krishnavatara Lila', there being only some minor differences between the two texts. In Rehbar's opinion the Research Department manuscript "appears to be older" and, therefore, more authentic. The word "Dyun", he says, appearing in verse 1172 of Grierson's version does not necessarily imply that the author of the work is named Dina Nath. To me, however, it appears that the manuscript Rehbar is referring to is an incomplete one as it does not carry any colophon giving the author's name which in Grierson's manuscript is very clearly shown to be Dina Nath. To me, however, it appears that the manuscript Rehbar is referring to is an incomplete one as it does not carry any colophon giving the author's name which in Grierson's manuscript is very clearly shown to be Dina Nath. Besides, the word "Dyun" seems to be a scribal error as the diminutive form of "Dina Nath" in Kashmiri is "Dina" and not "Dyun" in Kashmiri is "Dina and not "Dyun". Probably it is just "Din", which in Hindi means humble, meek or poor and also implies the poet's name. The controversy cannot be resolved unless the Research Department manuscript is again scrutinized by someone who knows the Sharada script – unlike Rehbar who is not at all familiar with it – in which it is written. This is quite near impossible as of now because of the situation prevailing in Kashmir. But such an

attempt has to be made to settle the issue, provided the manuscript has not been destroyed or lost.

Whatever the case may be, 'Shri Krishnavatara Lila' or 'Krishnavatara Charit' is of great importance in the study of the development of devotional poetry in Kashmiri. The work is said to have been greatly popular at the time Grierson acquired its manuscript, and continued to be held in reverence by Kashmir Hindus till at least the time when it was published, that is 1928. Today it is a totally forgotten piece of poetic work with no one after Grierson caring to have a look at it. Based on the tenth *skandha* of the Bhagavata Purana, the work narrates the life of Krishna, closely following the original "both in the general order of the events narrated and in details", though there are some attempts at adding local colour at places. Grierson has mainly dwelt on the archaisms and other linguistic features of the work in his rather not so elaborate introduction to it, instead of a critical appraisal. He finds its metre based on stress rather than quantity which makes it impossible for him to say "what was the original metrical foundation". While he may be right to some extent about each stress being a variable quantity, each verse in the narrative poem consists of four lines with the fourth line being a common refrain. This, together with the frequent use of internal rhyme, in the metrical pattern usually employed in the Kashmiri lyric form *vatsun,* with the difference that here the entire narrative follows the same pattern throughout, each verse terminating in "*lagas boh dasta dasta pamposh*" ("posy on posy do I offer lotuses").

At the very outset it becomes clear that devotion to the incarnate Krishna forms the dominant note of the work. As if to stress this, the second and the third stanzas are repeated at the end of each episode:

yus lagi Krishna juvanis navas ta
tas kari Krishna juv sarva vopakar

attempt has to be made [illegible]

[illegible] action. [illegible]

[illegible] [illegible] great importance in the [illegible] of the [illegible] [illegible]. The [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] half [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] of [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] While [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] difference that [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

yeti yash nith ta vati Vishnu-bawanas ta
lagas boh dasta dasta pamposh

pary pary Krishna juvnis navas ta
par pary tasundis avtaras
pary pary tastundis shoba tsaritas ta
lagas boh dasta dasta pamposh

[He who beareth in his heart the name of Krishna, to him will Krishna every favour render. In this world glory will he win, and thereafter the abode of Vishnu will he reach. To him posy on posy do I offer lotuses.

Ever dedicating myself to Krishna's name, ever dedicating myself to his incarnation, ever dedicating myself to his auspicious deeds, to him posy on posy do I offer lotuses.] (Trs: George Grierson)

Then follow the episodes one by one as narrated in the Bhagavata Purana with Narayana's promise on hearing Earth's plea that he will take birth in the house of King Vasudeva, on which Shukadeva, the narrator, says to King Parikshit : "Victory, victory to all your fortunes -- you who are rich in longing for Vishnu and devotion to Him". Shukadeva then relates all the events of Krishna's life as his *lila* or his divine play on the earth.

It is in this tone suffused with faith and devotion that the poet proceeds to describe the various exploits of Krishna as a divine incarnation, from the circumstances attending his birth, his bringing-up by Nanda and Yashoda, his childhood pranks and destruction of demons dispatched by Kamsa for killing him, to the slaying of Kamsa himself, his coronation rites and the story of Sudama. There is not much to distinguish the narration with most of the events described in brief. But evil

and hated as Kamsa was, his tyranny and cruelty knowing no bounds. the poet has redeemed even him at several places, bringing out a human side to his terror - inspiring character. When Vishnumaya cries shame to him for oppressing his sister and her spouse and for murdering babes, and tells him that his Death has already been born, he is for a while shown overcome with remorse, asking his sister Devaki's forgiveness and releasing her and her husband Vasudev from prison:

vani yeli gayi tas kamsas ta
khurith kyah-tany sornane pyav
khoran pyath pyav beni bemas ta
lagas both dasta dasta pamposh

kom as karin pana porashas ta
baly gos aprad bavith kyath
tohi pazi khyama wony karanas ta
lagas boh dasta dasta pamposh

[When this voice to Kamsa came, in his terror did he somewhat come into his right mind, and at the feet of his sister and her spouse he fell.

'My deeds were destined by the Supreme Himself. In vain have sown the deeds of sin. Now it befits you to grant me forgiveness]. (Trs: George Grierson)

Some of Krishna's childhood pranks and frolics have been described by the poet with relish and in some detail, especially the episodes regarding his stealing of butter and milk form the Gopi's homes, and the games he played with the cowherd children. The "butter-thief" Krishna emerges as a loving child on whom the cowherd-wives long to shower their affection. At one place he is shown filling his

mouth with milk and falling unabashedly into the arms of some cowherd's wife, spurting a stream of milk right into her face:

barith doda-gol kuni asi tas ta
neshuk gury-bayi yiyi athi zan
zagith doda phok buth diyi tas ta

In another verse we find him being chased by the Gopis, complaining to Yashoda how he wastes their butter and milk. But the more the "butter-thief" steals, the more does the love of the cowherds' wives keep increasing for him. They keep more and more milk for him to steal., thinking that "by this stratagem he may become enticed into our house to play his tricks". They privately set milk in way, fearing that he would leave them and find his way into his mother's lap. To this nestling by Krishna in her lap does the poet dedicate himself:

gury bayi saran dod tsuri tas ta
khotsan atsihekh maji kochhi lal
maji kochhi astanas pary lagahas ta

Krishna's frolics with the cowherd lads, and the various games that he played with them have been given delightful touches of local colour by the poet, even as his role as the divine redeemer of the world is highlighted by making the destruction of various demons by him look virtually like a child's play. In one of the games the lads of the defeated party have to carry the lads of the other party on their shoulders – a typically children's game in Kashmir. Krishna is shown as losing the game to Shridama and his party, having to stand and offer his back to him for a ride. And it is while the game is on that Haldhara kills the demon Pralamba disguised as a Gopa lad.

But perhaps the most beautiful passages in Dina Nath's 'Shri Krishna Lila' are those in which Krishna's dalliance with the Gopis has been described. There is an element of joyous abandon in the episodes showing Krishna playing on the enchanting flute, winning the hearts of the herd - maidens who are maddened and swoon as they look on his "Cupid-form". His moonlight sports with them fills them with intense longing for him, reaching a stage of complete surrender before him when he steals their garments leaving them stark naked in the waters of the Yamuna. Some of these passages take an allegorical turn even as they depict the Gopis' irrestible physical attraction for Krishna. They run after him, abandoning their house-hold duties and everything, with their impassioned hearts desiring nothing but to hold him in embrace:

gupiye sarey tali laji matnas ta
kamadiv vuchhy – vuchhy rozihekh na sor
lagahon kamna tsuru baranas ta
lagas bob dasta dasta pamposh

nyath prath gupiye pata larnas ta
kam - kot travith asa pata tas
nalamati ratahon kamadivas ta
lagas boh ……………………

[There all the herd-maidens began to be maddened, and swooned as they kept looking on his Cupid-form. Filled with intense longing for him did they all become.

Even after him ran the herd damsels, abandoning their household duties all, and with embraces would they clasp his Cupid – form.] (Trs: George Grierson)

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

zara – para kotah laje karnas ta
yima kama shury-bashe, yih kyah gav!
buznakh na, morali os vayinas ta
lagas boh ……………………

kuli pyatha vastar log dinas ta
yosa yiyi nanga bronth tas diyi bronth
maza log that kheli bala-krishnas ta
lagas boh …………………………

[How many entreaties did they made to him! What are these childish pranks! What is this that has happened to us! But he did not pay any heed to them and continued to play his flute.

He made ready to hand the garments to them from the tree, saying, "She who comes first before me naked, to her will I give her clothes". So with this frolic did he enjoy himself.] (Trs: George Grierson)

The episode has been interpreted as the need for the devotee to overcome body-consciousness before God and surrender himself totally before Him. But Dina Nath's Gopis while doing so succeed in extracting a promise from Krishna:

gupiyav yiy vatsa-band hyotahas ta
'asi suty zi rathah krida kar'
gupiyen kal ruz that yatsas ta
lagas boh ……………………………



rats aki purn os zun ratas ta
krishna juv morali vayan drav
vatsa-band palun pyav krishnas ta
lagas boh ....

[The spoken promise that they took from him was, 'Sport with us for but a single night'. And only with that promise was the Gopis' yearning stayed.

By night, all through the night shone the full moon, and playing on the flute forth Krishna went, for his uttered promise he had to keep.] (Trs: George Grierson)

The description of the Rasa dance is also enchantingly beautiful. The poet shows each of the herd-damsels having Krishna alone to herself, dancing with her with full abandon. In this love-intoxicated state, six months pass out as one night. But as they frolicked madly, Krishna hid himself from their midst. There is no mention of Radha by name in 'Shri Krishna Lila' of Dina Nath, but as in the Bhagvata, he is shown taking with him one herd-damsel, making the other damsels distraught with envy:

kosa sana gupi suty asi tas ta
kosa sana bagye bada priy gayi tas
kami sana asi manz man nyuv tas ta

[There is some Gopi who appears to be with him; some fortunate beauty has gained his love. Who can she be who has taken his heart away from us?]
(Trs: George Grierson)

The union between the cowherd- damsels and Krishna has been allegorically interpreted as the union between the ecstatic soul with the Supreme Self. The poet has also sensitively treated the familiar story of Sudama which is one of the

most poignant part of the work. Sudama has been shown as the ideal devotee whose heart does not get corrupted by the thought of wealth, but Krishna bestows upon him his unlimited grace, changing the very course of his poverty-stricken life. The superiority of devotion over knowledge has been brought out very effectively in the moving episode of Uddhava's mission to Mathura. Uddhava is humbled by the dedication of the cowherds and cowherd-damsels to Krishna, and finds their love worth more than all the hollow knowledge he posses:

gyanuk ahamkar tsol Uddhavas ta
dopun bakhti ay ta gupiyan hunz
gupiyan sariniy pyav padas ta
lagas boh ....

vot krishnas nisha soruy wonanas ta
gupiya sarinuy pyath kun chheh
tishuy bhakti asi prath bhaktas ta
Lagas boh ....

[Then from Uddhava did the egoism of knowledge flee. Cried he, "If such a thing as living devotion be, then that is what herd-damsels posses", and at their feet he fell.] (Trs: George Grierson)

The episode has been superbly treated by the Hindi poet Surdas, but the poet of 'Shri Krishna Lila', though nowhere near him in poetic excellence, has been able to give a poignant account of true devotion to God as exemplified by the Gopis. Perhaps that explains the great popularity of the work during the early decades of the last century. Unfortunately, this important work of devotional poetry in Kashmiri has been largely neglected by the critics, who have at best made a passing reference it. Even Grierson has dealt mostly with its linguistic aspect.

3. 'KESHAV PRAKASH' OF KESHAV RAZDAN : THE RADHA SVAYAMVAR THEME

While Parmanand and Krishna joo Razdan are without doubt the foremost among the Kashmir Krishna Bhakti poets, there are several other poets too who in their own way have contributed to enrich Bhakti poetry in Kashmir. A notable name among these is that of Keshav Razdan, a rather unknown poet attention to whose work 'Keshav Prakash', subtitled 'Radha Svayamvar', was drawn recently by Prof. A.N. Dhar, a scholar and a former head of the Post-graduate Department of English, Kashmir University, who was in possession of its only manuscript as a family heirloom. The author of the work, Keshav Razdan, was in fact the maternal grandfather of Prof. Dhar who was entrusted with its prized manuscript by his mother. It was only in 1993 that Prof. Dhar got the original manuscript, which was written in the Persian script, transliterated into Devanagari and published with a brief introduction, feeling "a sense of fulfillment" in presenting it to the readers. 'Keshav Prakash', however, is still an unfamiliar name for students of Kashmiri literature with only an article or two having been written about it so far. Yet, despite being a religious work, it has enough poetic qualities to merit its study in the context of the Bhakti tradition in Kashmiri poetry.

The author, Keshav Razdan, we are told, was a poet as well as a painter besides being a learned person coming from a respectable family of Kashmiri Pandits living at Aga Hamam, Habba Kadal, a locality in the heart of Srinagar. A younger contemporary of the great devotional poet Krishna joo Razdan, Keshav Razdan died in 1920, when he was only in his late forties, without coming into limelight as a poet or achieving any worldly success. Despite being "versatile in a number of fields including painting, astrology and poetry", we learn from Prof. A.N. Dhar's introduction to "Keshav Prakash", Keshav Razdan failed to secure a permanent government job and had to rest contended with temporary stints as a

teacher, having often to face financial problems. This, however, did not dampen his faith in God, to whom his devotion was deep and intense, often finding expression in poetic outpourings. In 'Keshav Prakash', he has taken up the traditional story of Radha's nuptial union with Krishna as the theme, weaving a beautiful narrative in verse suggestive of the communion between the Supreme Being and his Cosmic Energy. Showing admirable artistic skill in handling the verse narrative, the poet has enhanced its appeal by interspersing it with beautiful lyrics and hymns suffused with deep devotion for Krishna at psychologically sensitive places. One does not know how far, or whether at all, he was influenced or inspired by Parmanand's well-known work 'Radha Svayamvar' in his choice of the theme – he was only 13 when Paramanand died in 1885 – but Keshav's work does display innovative and imaginative flashes which are quite admirable. One thing that can be noted, however, is that both the poets have depicted Radha as *svakiya* (a heroine who has her husband for her lover) and not *parakiya* or a heroine who is the wife of a person other than her lover, as several poets of the Krishna Bhakti cult in other languages have portrayed her.

'Keshav Prakash', which the poet wrote in response to the request of his only son Dina Nath, opens with invocations to Lord Ganesha, in which he seeks the divine grace of the Remover of Obstacles and Bestower of Siddhis for the completion of the task he has undertaken. He also prays to Ganesha to bestow upon his son both devotion and worldly success while sustaining his own self in his *dhyana-dharana* or meditation. The poet next turns to his Guru and sings his praises, invoking his blessings for the fulfillment of his task and removal of his ignorance.

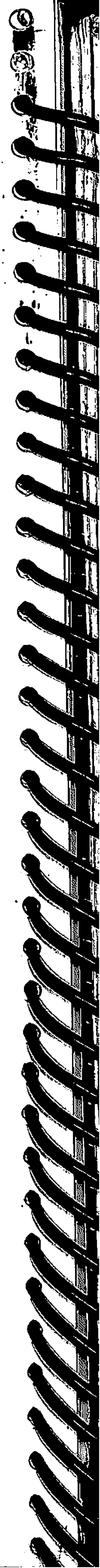
Referring to 'Garga Samhita' and 'Hari Shyama Kalyan', as the sources on which he has drawn for his story, Keshav Razdan now begins his narrative, showing Radha absorbed in Krishna's thoughts and waiting for him to come back to her as he had promised, having slain Kamsa and relieved the earth of his terror and

oppression. The *rishis* and the gods, along with the common people whom he had tyrannized and tortured, particularly Devaki and Vasudeva who had suffered immensely at his hands, are shown rejoicing at the demon's end. Having portrayed Krishna as the great Redeemer of the World, the poet now proceeds to present his image as the heart-throb of the Gopis and most adored idol of the people, the ever-sportive lord of the universe. As he returns to Gokul, the whole town gets delirious with joy, bursting into rapturous expressions of delight. His presence awakens the spirit of spring everywhere, with lotus buds blossoming forth and flowers displaying a riot of colour :

Log pholni zan nav bahar Gokul
Natu sampun swargu dwar Gokul
Vathrith vatan asy pamposhi dal
Vishnu su Krishna ju av gokul

[Gokul is looking exuberant as though celebrating the coming of a new spring. Or else it has become a gateway to heaven with lotus petals strewn along the pathways, as Krishna, incarnate Vishnu, enters Gokul]

All the people of the town have poured out on the streets, with heavenly damsels and gods joining them, rushing to have a glimpse of Krishna, incarnate Vishnu, and signing praises to him. They look like multitudes of shining stars descending upon the earth from the sky above. Crowds of jubilant people greet Krishna everywhere, showering flower petals upon him and every house resounds with joyful songs. Overcome by feelings of love and devotion, the Gopis loose their sense of time, night turning into day and dawn into dusk for them. Fringes of the fields and river banks become lush with greenery and fruit trees get laden with luscious fruit. Even withered trees sprout new shoots and leaves, while the waters of the Yamuna river become pure and clear :



Beryan bathyan sabzu deran gav
Bagan phaly myavu kulinuy pyav
Nyarmal sanpun Jamunayi zal

With the terror of Kamsa gone. it is indeed a most lovely dawn made more charming by an orchestra of notes presented by almost all the birds of Kashmir singing lustily to welcome the Lord. A perfect harmony prevails between nature and man, the outer landscape being but a reflection of the inner state of mind. The poet's description of the spirit of festivity that takes hold of Gokul on the arrival of Krishna appears to be suggestive of deeper meanings – it points to the ecstasies that the experience of God's living presence can bring to one's mind.

And who feels more exulted and elated on the occasion than Nandagopa and Yashoda! It is the right time they think to fix the day for Krishna's marriage with Radha. And who else arrives about just this time but Narada to help them in the task. Gladly he accepts the errand of carrying the proposal to Radha's parents. Brakhbhan (Vrishabhanu) and Sampata. The latter receive him with great honour and are overjoyed to hear the message. After mutual consultations the auspicious date for the wedding ceremony is fixed and Narada rushes post-speed to convey it to Nanda and Yashoda. He undertakes to extend the invitation in person to all the gods from Indraloka to Shivaloka. Everyone rejoices on hearing the good news and Nandagopa starts making preparations for the happy occasion in right earnest. Deviating from the traditional story. the poet now shows Nandagopa carrying the happy tidings himself to Vasudeva and Devaki and bringing them to Gokul with him after mutual consultations. They all wish a long and happy married life for Krishna and Radha. Nanda orders costly garments of *zarbaft* and *makhmal* (brocade and velvet) for everyone to be stored along with ornaments of gold and precious stones for wearing on the wedding day. Invitations are sent to friends and relatives, kings and noblemen. Fairies, celestial maidens and goddesses grace

Nanda's palace, singing marriage songs and chanting benedictory hymns to the accompaniment of various musical instruments. As the preparations are over, the festive spirit catches on and lends a new splendour to the entire cosmos. The whole of Gokul gets illuminated, as it were, with a divine light and everything around appears to be filled with ambrosia. Indescribable beauty and harmony pervade every place as a setting for the divine drama that is to unfold.

Poet Keshav Razdan presents the marriage of Radha and Krishna as a grand-gala event, a star-studded extravaganza in which the humans and the gods, the spiritual and the mundane, all mix and commingle and play their respective roles. He seems to relish describing the various ceremonies in their minutest details showing them being observed in the typical Kashmiri manner strictly according to Kashmiri Pandit rituals and customs. The profusion of local colour has lent a unique charm to 'Keshav Prakash', showing its poet at his innovative best. One such innovative episode is that of Menhdirat or the 'night of the henna' which is shown celebrated with equal enthusiasm in both Nanda - Yashoda's and Brakhbhan - Sampata's houses. Giving allegorical touches to the whole episode, the poet narrates it in a long but beautiful lyric "*svarguch manz hyath atshratsu aye*" in which we see celestial damsels, enter the portals of Nandagopa and also of Brakhbhan, carrying heavenly henna for applying to Krishna and Radha. Graceful and bewitchingly beautiful, the *apsaras*, sporting their fluttering head-dresses come with flower-garlands and colourful baskets in their hands. Their charming presence enlivens the atmosphere as the aroma of their scents and perfumes wafts through the air. The local colour becomes all the more distinct as the mother goddesses, Purna, mangala, Jaya and Vijaya, Krishna Pingala and Vishnu Maya together with Durga, Sharda and Ragnya grace the occasion. They are followed by Ananda, Madhumati, Vaikhuri, Kamala, Tripura, Sati, Saraswati, Shambhavi, Jwala and Vallabha – all manifestations of Shakti or the Divine Mother, eager to mark their presence and play their role at the propitious moment.

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Nor does the poet stop at that; he shows the sacred rivers Yamuna, Gaya, Vitasta, Ganga, Amaravati, Chandrabhaga, Godavari, Bhargashakha (it is difficult to identify this river and also Gaya) coming in person, carrying gold *kalashas* full of their holy waters for the holy bath of Radha as well as Krishna. The *kanishran* or the ritual bath precedes *devagun*, a ceremony in which the gods (especially the mother goddesses) are invoked for blessing the prospective bride or the bridegroom. The ceremony takes place amidst the *vanavun* or singing of benedictory songs in which the celestial *apsaras* join the *devis* and *devakanyas*. Sweet, melodious notes played on the Sarangi and Dhol flow from the Gau-loka making the music all the more enchanting. Some of the female divinities take pleasure in giving the holy bath to Krishna while some engage themselves in anointing and adorning Radha's body, helping her to array herself in silken garments and finery:-

Kenh Krishanas shran-dhyan karunavnas
Kenh Radhayi laji tan navunavnas
Paty vastra votharuni kayaye
Tsaye Nandu Gupunis daras
Pankaj padan tu beyi bozukamulan
Chhi malan svargu manz premay suty
Aji Shri Krishnas tu aji Radhaye
Tsaye Nandu Gupunis daras

[Some of them start giving a bath to Krishna while others find pleasure in anointing and adorning Radha and putting on silken garments on her body. With love they apply heavenly henna to the lotus hands and feet of the divine pair].

All of them pray for their longevity and eternal union, as also for the long life of Sampata, Yashoda and Devaki. In the meanwhile a Brahman priest from the bride's house arrives in Gokul carrying the scroll of *lagna* or the auspicious time of the marriage ceremony and communicates to Nandagopa the message of Brakhabhan. Krishna's sister Subhadra comes out to accord to him the ceremonial welcome with a pot full of gold coins. Informing the bridegroom's side of the auspicious moment fixed for the nuptials, the Brahmana entreats them to come with thousands of guests. He is laden with gifts of pearls and precious stones for his pains and is also given a cow and a horse. The note of consent conveyed by Brakhabhan through the Brahmana makes the former exclaim joyfully that his daughter's luck is on the ascendance.

All is set now for the wedding guests to assemble for proceeding to Brakhbhan's precinct in a procession. Clad in their finest and costliest costumes, bright and gleaming, wearing sweet perfumes on their bodies, they start congregating in Nandagopa's, large and magnificent assembly hall, their names sounding as virtual who's who of heaven and earth; the kings and princes come driving their chariots; the Gandharavas through in large numbers singing tuneful verses of Samaveda and playing on musical instruments like the *dhol, dabar* and *santoor* whose sweet notes fill the air. It looks as if the entire Gandharvaloka, Indraloka and Devaloka have descended on the earth to take part in the celebrations. Indra comes with a retinue of kings mounted on horses and elephants caparisoned with gold-embroidered cloth. The *devas* assemble singing praises to Krishna and moving fly-whisks around him. In the front row come important and well-known *apsaras*, dancing and signing. Ganesha sounds the Panchjanya conch, while Narada merrily sings songs in praise of Hari. The centre of everybody's attention is Krishna, looking gorgeous as bridegroom and wearing a glittering crown. Attired in a gold-embroidered costume, he casts a spell on everyone, with pear-necklaces, gold bracelets and gold ear-rings adorning his body. He drapes the *pitambara* (yellow

robe) around his shoulders with *kaustubha* gem on his chest dazzling more brightly than the sun. He puts on the *vaijayanti mala* and the *vanamala* (floral garlands) round his neck and holds a lotus in his hand. He is made to stand on the *vyug* or the decorative *mandala* symbolizing the cosmic circle prepared by Maya herself. Beholding him in this form *bhaktas* and *siddhas* feel greatly jubilant. Devaki and Yashoda kiss him again and again on the forehead, offering him sugar crystals.

And now the marriage procession winds its way slowly towards Brakhabhan's residence, some mounted on their horses and elephants and others driven by their chariots. The poet describes the scene as a grand spectacle, with Sheshanaga himself bearing the *chhatra* (parasol) in his hand, Narada Muni singing devotional tunes and Jaya and Vijaya acting as the staff-bearers. All the roads are sprinkled with the essence of flowers. Rudra, Brahma, Vishnu, Ishwara, Sadashiva, all are there riding on their respective mounts, while the commander of the *deva* legions, Kartikeya, comes mounted on his peacock, clad in golden apparel. To the accompaniment of musical notes, gods and kings proceed ahead keeping to their respective lanes. The *saptarishis (seven* sages) too are there, carrying water from seven rivers and sprinkling Krishna with the scents of flowers, camphor, sandalwood, amber and musk all mixed together, making the ambience fragrant. Haldhar Balarama is attired in a golden-dress, looking more resplendent in his chariot than the sun. The gods are again and again signing the praises of Krishna, the bridegroom, who is seated on an elephant.

The marriage procession now approaches Brakhbhan's place, the path leading to which is strewn with flowers with velvet sheets spread on it to welcome the wedding guests. They move in chariots, *dolis* or palanquins, which are so numerous that is difficult to count them :



Vatan vothuravymuty makhmal tu posh asy
Yohay Brakhbhanune kulu zi rosh asy
Pakan hyath doli, rath, zanpanu varah
Vanith kus heki timan kamy kor shumarah

Here the poet adds yet another touch of local colour. He shows Indra, the king of gods, carrying *sanjvor* (a papier mache decoration box) as a gift, while Sumeru the ornaments and Samudra the most lustrous pearls and gems. The party now enters the premises of Brakhbhan's palace where a large hall has been decorated to receive the guests.

Here Ganesha utters "Hari Om" and blows the conch to intimate the arrival of the marriage procession. As the party enters the courtyard, ladies of the house flock to the windows to have a glimpse of the bridegroom. With great joy, they sing marriage songs and shower flower petals on Krishna.

In one of their benedictory songs *(mangalachara)*, the ladies extol the fortune of Radha for becoming the bride of Shri Narayana – *"toshi sondari nyarmal thaavith man / Shri Narayan tse varne oy"* (Be happy O beautiful lady, Shri Narayana has come to make you his bride). From this song we learn how the wedding guests are welcomed and seated at Brakhbhan's with Indra at the head and the *sadhus* and *sants* in different rows. Mother Annapurna herself attends to the guests at the marriage banquet, serving them with the choicest of dishes in gold-plates. Sharika, Ragnya and Mahavidya are also there to help her. People are beyond themselves with joy as they see Ganesha and other gods seated with Shri Krishna on the occasion. The four-faced Brahma is there himself to recite the four Vedas, while Shila, Sita, Vijaya, Pingala and Mangala are in attendance holding the fly-whisks in their hands. The entire retinue of gods is present with their

respective *ayudhas* (weapons). The wedding guests are happy after being treated to a most sumptuous feast.

Further intensifying the local colour, the poet now describes the *dvara puja*, an important ceremony in a Kashmiri Pandit marriage. After Radha and Krishna are received on the *vyug* or the cosmic *mandala* drawn in the pattern of a thousand-petalled lotus, the ceremonial *sapta-ratna deepa* (seven - jeweled lamps) are lit in their honour and sugar candy is offered to them by Sampata. Brakhbhan himself comes to perform the *puja* amidst *vanavun* (singing of marriage songs) by the ladies :

Triyav hyot vanavunuy laj shobhu vela
Tyuthuy Radhayi triyi vanavuni lajaye
Khatsukh vigis tu beh pyath lagnu shaye

[The ladies started singing benedictory songs in that auspicious moment: they expressed their good wishes for the lovely Radha. "having stood on the vyug (cosmic *mandal)*, take your seat, on the *lagna-mandapa* now". they tell her. "The *ashta-siddhis*, (eight spiritual powers), your foster-mothers, will accompany you to the place".]

In one of these marriage songs, they congratulate Radha for becoming the bride of Shri Bhagvan, the Lord Himself – "*Ayakh Bhagi Shri Bhagvanas*". Wishing a happy and prosperous life to the *yajamani* Sampata, they tell Radha to put her feet on the sandal-wood door, "so that the marriage rituals are performed by your Indra-like father".

Similar sentiments are expressed in the songs *"varne oy Shri Narayan"* (Shri Narayana has come to take your for His bride") and *"trizagath palay salay av"* ("The sustainer of the three worlds has come to us as our guest"). Among those who have come to offer their love and affection to the divine pair are Tripura, Brahmavidya, Siddhalakshmi, Gayatri, Savitri and Mangaleshwari, as we come to learn from these choruses. Brahma Himself has come to take His seat on the *lagna – mandpa* and take part in the flower - offering ceremony *(poshi puza)* together with three crores of gods and goddesses. They have gathered flowers from Kailash, Govardhan and Himalaya to offer bouquets to Krishna. Celestial damsels have brought with them baskets full of flowers. Interestingly, the poet shows Krishna accompanied by *rindas* from Ayodhya, Delhi and Lahore and princes from Kashi, Kashmir and Nepal. Other prominent guests are Dharmaraja, Indra, Brahma, Mahadeva and Lokapala Varuna besides numerous other gods, goddesses, *rishis* and ascetics. Shesha Naga is shown holding a golden parasol and is dressed in brocades adorned with sparkling pearls. The guests have been transported to the place in different kinds of colourfully decorated pleasure-boats besides elephants, chariots, and palanquins. Musicians and dancers have come all the way from the Gandharva Loka to joint the party, creating enchanting melodies. Kubera, the treasurer of gods, rubs shoulders with the staff-bearers Jaya and Vijaya, ten Dakshapalas and Vitala Bhairava. A bounteous shower of gold coins and precious jewels upon the bridegroom and his party falls on the path in heaps, making the wretched poor instantly rich. The lyric ends with the poet hailing Krishna as the "Light of our eyes, the luster of his friends and the death (Mahakala) of his foes." All eyes are on Him, who is "benevolent to his *bhaktas* and protector of the poor and deprived".

What follows next is a detailed description of different rituals associated with the *lagna* ceremony of a Kashmiri marriage. As the marriage hymns are chanted and the sacred syllables *'bhu, bhuvah, svah"* uttered, Krishna exchanges *japhals*

(nutmegs) with Brakhbhan. The bride and the bridegroom now ascend the stairs to perform the ceremony. Radha takes her seat to the left of Krishna, looking resplendent like the moon facing the sun. Brakhabhan starts making sacrificial offerings to the sacred fire, which are accepted by the Agni Devata (the god of fire) in person as he is present on spot for the purpose. Devas, Rishis, Brahmanas are busy, happily chanting the *lagna-mantras* and Vedic hymns. The incense rising from musk, sandalwood, ghee and camphor is filling the air with fragrance. Different musical instruments play divine music as the *asparas* (celestial damsels) dance and sing melodious songs. The bride and the bridegroom are shown each other's reflection in the mirror as river Vitasta, functioning as the *ganga-vyas* (Ganga as the friend of Radha) and carries the *samvit amrita* that she sprinkles on everyone present as the couple is made to join hands by Garga and Vyasa. Both Krishna and Radha are asked to place their feet on a small boulder symbolic of steadfastness. Radha is made to go through the ritual of stepping over seven gold coins, with which she enters the *gotra* of Krishna. She looks as resplendent as the moon among the stars. Nanda now exchanges the ritual walnuts with her. Entering from a different door, Sampata ties *manna mala (mangala mala)* to Krishna's jewel-studded coronet after having given gold and jewels in *dakshina* to the Brahman priests.

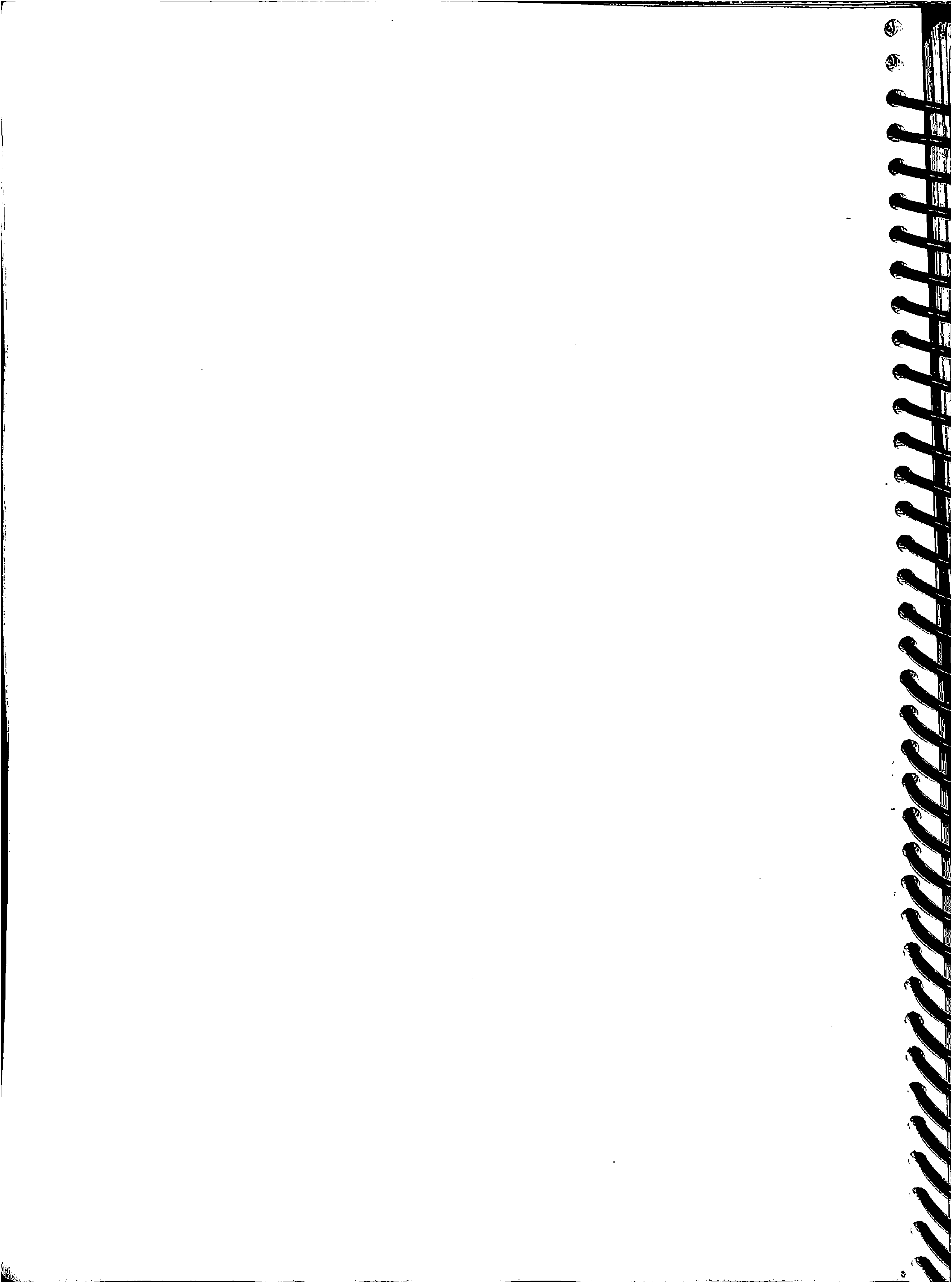
Poet Keshav Razdan now adds a unique innovative episode to the story to present his views on the relationship between Bhakti and Jnana. There is no intrinsic difference between the two, he believes, as they both lead to the same objective: the realization of Brahma or the Supreme Reality. He illustrates this by the realization that Radha's mother Sampta achieves as she offers sugar candy first to Krishna and then to Radha according to Kashmiri Hindu custom. To her great excitement, she beholds Parabrahma united with Shakti in His opened mouth. It is the vision of Krishna's *vishvarupa* or cosmic manifestation that she has, realizing that Brahmajnana is the culmination of devotion and penance and

Brahma is immanent in the phenomenal cosmos and yet transcendent – beyond everything. Just as a single colour is transformed into different colours, the un-manifested manifests himself in the universe, in the animate as well as the inanimate. Radha is born through *maya* to be united with Him, as She is Shakti, the Cosmic Energy. In Him She sees the existence of all the living species – the forty lakh *yonis*. He is the one who shines with the brilliance of thousands of suns. He is the spotless *tejas* into which myriad colours get absorbed finally. He shines in everything and everything shines because of Him. He is the subtlest of subtle, one who is beyond comprehension, one without a beginning or end, the cause of all causes. He is beautiful within and without. Yet the *bhaktas* and *sadhakas* can see Him through their *nirmala bhava*.

Sampata has the same beauteous vision of cosmos again when she puts another piece of sugar candy into Radha's mouth. She comes to realize that Radha and Shakti are one and the same. Every phenomenon in the world is a manifestation of Shakti, like all the light emanating from within the word and getting absorbed back into it. She also finds that there is no difference between Bhakti and Shakti and realizes that Brahma and His Shakti are not separate from each other, but one like the flower and its scent. It is because of Shakti that that the attributeless Brahma is known, they are one like *nada* and *bindu*. Bhakti, she comes to know, is difficult to attain, yet it is only through *bhakti* that *mukti* or salvation can be attained. Keshav Razdan metaphorically uses this episode for interpretation of his philosophy of Bhakti which, he believes, is a means to achieve *brahmajnana* or knowledge of the Supreme Reality. He express this philosophy through the several devotional hymns that he makes, Sampata, goddess Saraswati herself and even goddess Uma to sing. Saraswati calls Radha Mangaleshwari, for she showers her benediction on everyone who approaches her with devotion. Keshav Razdan is convinced that this is the reason why those who constantly pray to her obtain release from worldly bonds. He emphasizes the oneness of the divine and the

human when he describes the final scene of the wedding ceremony – the ritual of serving food to the bride and the bridegroom known as *daybatta* or the food offered to Shiva-Parvati or Lashmi-Narayana of whom the two are supposed to be living representatives. This also conveys the essence of a Kashmiri Hindu marriage. In the end the poet prays to the Lord for His divine grace, exhorting Him to take pity on him and grant him shelter in His feet.

Keshav Razdan's emphasis throughout has been on describing *aishwarya* or the divine majesty of God, rather than on depicting human emotions. Despite giving the subtitle of "Radha Svayamvar" to the work, he makes no attempt to show her relationship with Krishna develop through various stages of love as poet Parmanand has done in his work also having the same title, nor does he describe her physical beauty and charm or that of Krishna and the spell cast by him on the Gopis which form the theme of most of Krishna Bhakti poetry. He lacks depth, and limits himself to describing the grandeur and regal spendour of Krishna and Radha, though by adding local colour to the various ceremonies and rituals related to their marriage he has succeeded in making the work interesting and even artistically appealing to a considerable extent. As for his language, he prefers "plain and simple words to the merely conventional", as Prof. A.N. Dhar has written in his Introduction. It is the colloquial speech used in common parlance in Kashmiri Pandit households, with some easily understandable philosophical terms interspersed. The marriage lyrics have a pleasing musical quality and an appeal that usually folk songs have.



4. PARAMANAND : DEVOTIONAL RAPTURES OF KRISHNA LILA

Bhakti poetry witnessed a great upsurge in Kashmir in the late 18th and 19th centuries when a set of spiritually dedicated poets appeared on the literary scene with their concept of a personal God who can be adored and loved. Directing their devotion to deities like Rama, Krishna, Shiva and the Mother Goddess as manifestations of the Ultimate Reality, they looked to the pan-Indian Bhakti movement for inspiration at a time when Persian influence on Kashmiri literature was at its highest with the *ghazal* and *masnavi* becoming the generally adopted modes of expression. This fact in itself is quite significant as it points to an attempt of renewal of contacts with the mainstream of Indian literary tradition. There were, of course, definite socio-religious and political reasons for it, but it nevertheless resulted in the emergence of Bhakti - centred poetry as one of the major trends of 19th century Kashmiri literature. Among the poets who set this trend in motion and distinguished themselves as its leading lights, the name of Paramanand is foremost. He was, in fact, one of the most dominating literary figures of his time in Kashmir, and not merely a religious poet.

While his ability of transform his mystic experiences and spiritual insight into soul - elevating poetry constituted a greater part of his poetic appeal, Paramanand was also a consummate and conscious artist. His claim to greatness lay much in his superb expressive powers as in the devotional passion that informs his works and the high spiritual values that they enshrine. That is what makes him occupy a unique position among his contemporaries most of whom did little more than imitating Persian *ghazals* and *masnavis* in a manner that betrayed a woeful lack of originality. Amidst sickening repetitions of the worn out *gul* and *bulbul* symbolism, and hackneyed expressions, Paramanand broke a new path with his songs and psalms and litanies and narrative poems saving Kashmiri poetry from

stagnation. Bhakti, with the love-sports of the Divine Couple Radha – Krishna at its centre became his point of departure, opening up unlimited possibilities for creative imagination and encompassing in its range unexplored depths of man's emotional and spiritual consciousness. God for him was not a vaguely felt abstraction but the one reality that pervades the whole universe companioning and consoling each human soul. He used the theme of Krishna's divine play to expound a profound philosophy of Love that transcends sectarian barriers and recognizes devotion as the only way to seek the ultimate reality.

Born in 1791 at Sir village near the pilgrimage town of Mattan located on the foot of the mountain leading to Amarnath, Paramanand lived till the ripe old age of 94 – a long span during which he composed masterpieces of Bhakti or Lila poetry suffused with deep mysticism. He died in 1885, but it was only in 1941 that the world outside came to know about him when Master Zinda Kaul, himself a great poet, brought out the first of the three volumes of his complete works with an English translation and an excellent introduction. Masterji, as Zinda Kaul is popularly called, was the first to come out with a broad biographical sketch of Paramanand, incorporating as many facts about his life as he could gather. He was also the first to critically edit the text of the saint – poet's works, collating manuscripts made available to him by one of Paramanand's major disciples, Pandit Narayana Kaul. Giving a hint about the methodology adopted by him and the difficulties he encountered in bringing out critical edition of the text, Master Zinda Kaul regrets that the manuscript copies of most of Paramanand's works did not closely adhere to any rules whatever of phonetic or even regularly bad spelling "Strange as it may seem", he writes, "it did not strike any of them to provide the few additional vowels and consonants essential for the correct writing of Kashmiri in the Persian or Hindi script. In consequence of this negligence it is now extremely difficult to decipher what they have probably ill understood and certainly mis-represented". In such circumstances, Masterji chose

to rely on the manuscripts of Pandit Narayan Kaul who had copies "faithfully if not intelligently", from some "older and more authentic manuscript". Masterji has also referred clearly to his anxiousness to let nothing pass for Paramanand's composition which does not bear his stamp.

The other two volumes of Paramanand's works were published by Masterji in 1942 and 1958 respectively, attributing the long gap between the second and the third volumes to the "considerable difficulty" he had to face in seeing it through the press, but without mentioning what this "difficulty" was. Later, selections from the poet – saint's poems were made for the J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages by Prof. S.K. Toshakhani with an introduction in Kashmiri. In November 1983, the Academy brought out another critical edition of Paramanand's works co-edited by Prof. S.K. Toshakhani and Moti Lal Saqi. In his introduction to the edition (it was published after Prof. Toshakhani's death). Moti Lal Saqi while appreciating Master Zinda Kaul's efforts in making Paramanand's select poems accessible to a wider audience, has accused Masterji of abridging his 'Radha Svayamavar' by mixing up and changing the order of several verses and deleting some of them altogether from the actual text. He has also taken Prof. Jai Lal Kaul and other critics to task for having attributed several lyrics written by Paramanand's disciple Lakshman Kaul 'Bulbul' of Nagam to Paramanand without caring to even mention Bulbul's name. Saqi, claims that he and his co-editor have restored in their edition the portions dropped or abridged by Masterji, presented the verses in their actual order and duly mentioned the name of Lakshman Kaul Bulbul wherever his verses or lyrics have been included in his master's works. According to Saqi, the edition co-edited by him with Prof. S.K. Toshakhan is based on a more authentic manuscript than that copied by one Balakram Bhat of Nagam and made available to the co-editors by his grandson Pandit Arjan Nath Bhat.

To be fair to Masterji, he has himself not hesitated in stating that he has given only "selections" from Paramanand's poems, "leaving out much that has been rendered worthless through want of care and lack of intelligence". He has also left it to some "better qualified" future researcher to "restore much that has been dropped now, regretting that he could not obtain "the much more reliable manuscript written by Pandit Lakshmanji of Nagam". While one cannot but appreciate the improvements made in the text by Prof. S.K. Toshakhani and Moti Lal Saqi, there is little that one can add to the facts about the poet - saint's life given by Master Zinda Kaul – at least in the present circumstances. Also one cannot but agree with Masterji's overall assessment of Paramanand's position as a poet, which still holds true. He writes : "Paramanand (Pt. Nand Ram) of Matan easily surpasses all his known predecessors in the technique of metre and rhyme, and all excepting Lalla in mysticism. He is deeply devotional and highly philosophical. His didactic poems and even his psalms and litanies have not yet been surpassed. His *forte,* however, is the description of Shri Krishna Lila, into which he has thrown all his heart and soul and intellect." This "succinctly sums up" the contribution of Paramanand to Kashmiri Poetry," Prof. Braj Bihari Kachru has pointed out in his book "Kashmiri Literature".

Not much work has been done on Paramanand since Masterji introduced him to both non-Kashmiris and Kashmiris, no significant light having been thrown on his development as a poet by Prof. Jai Lal Kaul or Motilal Saqi and Prof. S.K. Toshakhani even. Moti Lal Saqi has not said anything substantially different from what Master Zinda Kaul has pointed out in his Introduction to his 'Paramanand Sukti Sara' (Selected Poems of Paramanand). He has made a casual reference to his 'Radha Swayamvar' being "related to the philosophy of Nimbarkacharya" and said something about the presence of *'madhurya bhava"* in it in a cloyingly flowery language. This, however, does not add up to much. In his 'Studies in Kashmiri,' Prof. J.L. Kaul has not gone much beyond what Master Zinda Kaul has

said, albeit in a slightly different language, with an attempt to make a point here and there. Prof. Braj B. Kachru has remained contented with doing little more than paraphrasing Masterji. This is virtually all we have in the name of Paramanand studies, except my attempt at a reappraisal of the poet-saint in my 'Kashmiri Sahitya Ka Itihas (History of Kashmiri Literature). Thus a major Kashmiri poet of the 19th century has been disposed off with many aspects of his poetic genius left unexplored. It will be my endeavour here to touch upon some of these, though not as exhaustively as I would have liked as that calls for an exclusive and full-fledged study.

What I would like to point out first of all is that Paramanand's philosophy of Bhakti is eclectical, something that he derived from different sources, the alchemy of his poetry transforming everything to what appears to be a profound vision of man's relationship with God. Paramanand is said to have listened to the Bhagvata and the Mahabharata, the Shiva Purana and other religious scriptures at the feet of some Sanskrit scholars with whom he happened to come into contact in his village. He is also believed to have studied the Shaiva philosophy of Kashmir as well as Vedanta quite deeply, besides Kundalini Yoga, probably from his family guru Atma Ram and his son, and a Sannyasi Swami Atmanand of Varanasi, with who he remained closeted at his own house "for days and months" according to Master Zinda Kaul. Sadhus coming from all over India who passed through Matan on their way to the sacred Amarnath cave, introduced him to the works of the Vaishnava saint-poets of North India like Kabir, Nanak and the compositions of the Sikh holy book Granth Sahib. The songs of the famous Hindi Bhakti poet Surdas also reached him in this manner. All these varied influences, and not Nimbarka alone, helped to give shape to his concept of Bhakti and his philosophy of divine love and it is their resonance that one can hear in his poetry. But one thing that is more significant and has gone virtually un-noticed is that Paramanand eventually interprets everything in terms of

Kashmir Shaiva thought. His tendency to interiorize situations seems to point towards this fact.

It was at the age of twenty-five, when he had already succeeded his father as the Patwari (village revenue assessment officer) of Matan, that Paramanand "found his tongue" at the temple of the Goddess of Learning, Sarasvati, by the side of the sacred spring in his native village Sir. While meditating there, the following lines fell from his lips:

> Listen, it is Sarasvati who is speaking, listen
> Why does it not penetrate into you,
> O my soul,
> Though repeated so often.

And that was the beginning of a long journey of his divinely inspired muse. Sarasvati was not the name of the goddess of learning only but also of his mother.

Paramanand's earliest poems were plaints addressed to the Mother Goddess and other Hindu deities "for mercy and forgiveness" and deliverance from sin. Master Zinda Kaul calls them *"dinakrandana"* or wails of a distressed person, dividing his works into five thematically ordered groups in absence of a clear chronological order evidenced in them. The first of these groups consist of these short hymns with a touch of personal pathos in them, while in the last which he calls the "crowning group", he has placed Vedantic and philosophical poems – the ripest fruits of his old age and matured wisdom. In the second group he places Paramanand's poems related to the practice of yoga, a longish symbolic poem about the pilgrimage to Amarnath, and one of his most popular allegorical poems *"santosha byali bavi ananda phal"* (the seed of contentment will yield the harvest of bliss). Grouped next are his three long narrative poems, 'Sudama

Charitra', 'Radha Svyamvara' and 'Shiva Lagna', followed by some of his short didactic poems meant for spiritual aspirants. Prof. Jai Lal Kaul has reduced the groups to four with poems like the one on Amarnath pilgrimage given the topmost place for their philosophical content.

However, in my opinion such categorization is only of academic value and has little to do with actual evaluation of Paramanand's standing as poet or critical analysis of his poetry. What matters is the poet's awareness of the existential situation and his insight into various aspects of the human condition as also the artistic values which find expression in ~~at~~ his work. Looking from this view-point, we can easily discern the high-points of Paramanand's creativity. His genius attained its full fruition in his three narrative poems, the 'Radha Svayamyar', 'Sudama Charitra' and 'Shiva Langna' as well as in some of his miscellaneous poems and devotional songs like '*Karma Bhimika*', '*Sahaz Vyatsar*', '*Kul ta Tshay*' and '*Kasi yama bhay chon preyam ta lolo*'.

'*Radha Svayamyar*' and '*Sudama Charitra*', are both narrative poems depicting the divine play of Krishna and unfolding its deeper meanings through the devices of allegory and metaphor. In both incidents from Krishna's life are invested with symbolic dimensions by the use of subtly suggestive words and expressions. There is "strange but deft admixture of the human and the divine" in these works, with Krishna depicted as the Ultimate Reality pervading the whole universe, complete identification with whom alone leads to beatitude. Master Zinda Kaul regards 'Sudama Charitra' to be a work preceding "Radha Svayamvar' on the basis of internal evidence. But in Prof. Jailal Kaul's view it was written later as it is a "more mature and objective work". Prof. ~~Kanil~~ Kaul finds in 'Radha Svayamavar" youthful joy and abandon, which according to him goes to prove that it was written by Paramanand when he was young. Nothing, however, can be said with certainty in this matter, but Prof. Kaul's reliance on stylistics does



not take us far as both the works have many stylistic elements in common. For instance, if 'Radha Svayamvar' begins with the adoration of Krishna as "the glorious Lord Shining with the light of pure consciousness", 'Sudama Charitra' too starts with hailing Devakinandan (the son of Devaki) "on whose birth light dawned out of darkness". Both have the first line as the refrain which is repeated after every three lines. As for the "joyous abandon of youth" that Prof. Kaul finds in 'Radha Svayamavar', it is in the very theme of the poem – the union of
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...al poetry. Radha's, and the Gopis', love for
... longing of the human soul for full identification
...is a love that calls for dissolution of the ego and
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...aj establish various relationships with him. As a
... friend and companion the cowherd boys and as
...o break their bonds with everyone else but him.
... him alone. This gives rise to tender situations
...nanda with great artistic sensitivity and charm.

This tendency to interpret everything allegorically in a way that external events get projected as an inner drama ever going on in mind's Gokul points to his greatness as a creative genius. The allegory unfolds its dimensions at the very beginning in the work where Krishna is addressed in Kashmir Shavite terms as "Light of Pure Consciousness".

Bata Pattar (2)
On their way to Yatra, Batas
sing Rof to please deity.





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With the question of chronological order far from settled, it is really of little consequence it I start with 'Radha Svayamvar' for analyzing if I start with 'Radha Svayamvara' for analyzing the idea of Bhakti as conceived by Paramanand in this masterpiece of devotional poetry. Radha's, and the Gopis', love for Krishna represents the intensive longing of the human soul for full identification with God as the cosmic lover. It is a love that calls for dissolution of the ego and its merger with the supreme consciousness, leaving behind all ideas of difference. In fact, Krishna here himself takes the form of love and not only Radha and the Gopis but all the denizens of Braj establish various relationships with him. As a son he delights his mother, as a friend and companion the cowherd boys and as a lover Radha and the Gopis, who break their bonds with everyone else but him, findings fulfillment in love for him alone. This gives rise to tender situations which are described by Paramananda with great artistic sensitivity and charm. This tendency to interpret everything allegorically in a way that external events get projected as an inner drama ever going on in mind's Gokul points to his greatness as a creative genius. The allegory unfolds its dimensions at the very beginning in the work where Krishna is addressed in Kashmir Shavite terms as "Light of Pure Consciousness".

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"gokul hriday myon tati chon guryvan
tsyat vimarsh adiptiman bhagvano
vratsa myani gopiya tsey pata laran
bansuri nada vada matano
nasharith hyas ta hosh mashrith par ta pan
tsyat vimarsh adiptiman bhagvano

[Gokul is my heart. where you keep your cows
O Glorious Lord, shining with the
Light of pure consciousness
The instincts of mind are the Gopis
Who hanker after you alone
Maddened by the spell-binding call of your flute
Loosing their senses
And oblivious of self and non - self]

Like the Vaishnava poets of Bengal. Paramanand has made Radha the heroine of 'Radha Svayamvar', and like the followers of Nimbarka's philosophy his devotion is centred in the Divine Couple Radha and Krishna. The work begins with Radha's birth and childhood frolics and culminates in her marriage with Krishna. The well-known episodes of Krishna's divine play, like his dalliance in the bowers of Vrindavan, playing on the flute, teasing the Gopis, dancing the Rasa dance, stealing the garments of Gopis, removal of Rukmini's pride, departure for Mathura with Akrura, slaying of Kamsa etc. have all been incorporated in the story and described with great beauty and imagination. But the spotlight is mainly on Radha and her dedication to Krishna. There are a number of innovations, with Paramanand introducing new episodes like Krishna taking away the garments of Radha and watching her taking a bath, Gopis setting out in search of Krishna who disappears in the midst of Rasa and so on, which point to

the poet's ingenuity and innovative skill. But despite the poet's remarkable narrative skill, the emphasis in 'Radha Svayamvar' is more on deeper meanings than the outer play, the poet taking us "from the concrete and the real to the abstract and the ideal".

Paramanand's penchant for suggestiveness lends peculiar charm to the narrative in 'Radha Svayamvar'. Like a conscious artist, the likes to convey things through subtle suggestion rather than flat description. Thus, Narada is taken aback when he has a look at child Radha's horoscope, and this gesture of his conveys infinitely more than repetition of a thousand epithets like "Mother of the Universe". As in Rupa Goswami's 'Ujjvala Nilamani', Paramananda has portrayed Radha as *svakiya* or a heroine who is faithful to her husband, rather than *parakiya* or a heroine who is the wife of a person other than her loves. He has shown Yashoda affectionate towards the child Radha and eager to make her her daughter-in-law. The Gujrati Bhakti poet Bhalan has made Yashoda express a similar desire from her mouth. Paramanand has shown Radha and Krishna attracted towards each other from their childhood giving birth to many a tender situations. At first Radha while courting Krishna's love hides herself away from him and hears the charming notes of his flute from a distance. But soon the two meet and love between them sprouts and grows. Paramanand has portrayed the varied shades of emotions from the simple affection of childhood days to the sweet dreams of adolescence to the delightful amorous play on the advent of full youth with great sensitivity and artistic skill. Radha's father Vrishbhan (Brakhbhan in the work) looks with approval at this youthful attraction between the two and sends his family priest with formal proposal of marriage but there is a sudden hiccup – Krishna's notoriety as butter thief could harm the family's reputation. To avoid an embarrassing situation, Radha's mother sends a rare pearl necklace as a gift to Nanda and Yashoda, expecting that they may not be able to send a return gift according to (Kashmiri) custom. But Krishna snatches away



the necklace from Yashoda's hands and sows the pearls at a far off place and from these pearls grows a luxuriant harvest of pearls. Everybody is askance at this development [illegible] the date for the marriage is fixed. This episode is entirely a product of Paramanand's imagination and seems to have been introduced by him not only make the story more interesting but also to indicate Krishna's divine majesty as the Supreme Being. Paramanand's description of Radha and Krishna's marriage presents an image of the eternal union of *prakriti* and *purusha* (Nature and the Divine Person):

- "The god of winds looked to the sweeping of the ways, that of rain had them plastered with clay; the spirit of spring carpeted the ways with flowers of various hues.

- "The sun and moon hold lamps to make illumination; lightening holds the umbrella (of clouds). Maya rocks the cradle in order that the Lord may not be disturbed in his slumber. [Trs. Master Zinda Kaul]

One of the most beautiful additions introduced in the story, the Mohini episode. which shows Krishna meeting Radha at her house in the guise of woman selling bangles is the creation of Paramanand's disciple Lakshman joo Budbul. But there are several other episodes, equally innovative and beautiful that have been introduced by the master himself. In one such episode Krishna is shown suddenly disappearing along with Radha while enjoying Rasalila with the Gopis. This sudden disappearance of the two makes the Gopis mad and distraught, unable to bear separation from their Love. The love-stricken maids search for him in all quarters, wandering from wood to wood and place to place, but they find him nowhere, and hear the flute afar. "Being at the end of their costs, they suffer hallucinations from shadows". And even as they are frantically looking for him. they find "Radha too weeping on the wayside". She who was rejoicing that she



was dear to him whom she loved with all her heart, had lost him in the way. This was Krishna's way of humbly her sling as her heart was swelling with the idea that she was his beloved. Weeping and sobbing they all seek in all directions "the one who is beyond space":

vana-vana pheran krishnas vanavan
hiri gayi viri tang mangano
heri-bona tsharith heri asa nomran....

[Wandering from wood to wood, singing Krishna's praises, they looked like distracted persons expecting help from unlikely quarters. (pears from a willow). Finally having searched high and low they bent their heads (in resignation).]
(Trs: Master Zinda Kaul)

velap yats ta shechi lukan prutshana
vansi maz kansi yus na melano
bansuri vayan tohy ti chhiva bozan ....

[Amid much sorrowing and weeping they make enquiries from people, 'He whom no one finds in a life - time spent in search is playing the flute, you hear it, don't you?'] (Trs: Master Zinda Kaul)

And then Krishna reappears as suddenly as he had disappeared. They see him come dancing and go into ecstasies at the sight. They can't believe their eyes and it seems to them as if he had all along been where he now was. It is with the intensity of love, Paramanand explains, that Maya disappears and God will reveal himself in everything. And the maidens and Radha dance everyday with Krishna who comes in their midst to dance. They see no one there but Krishna, who himself makes love to himself. Soon the girls become intoxicated with the play in

full swing. The Rasa Lila transforms their love into mystic devotion and they become ecstatically forgetful in his presence and heart - broken in separation. Paramanand shows even the stones melt and the trees sway under the magic spell of Krishna's flute.

Krishna Kavya (poetry centred round the Krishna theme) is generally associated with transgression of moral codes and breaking of the bonds of domesticity so as to establish links with the Divine Person Krishna alone. There is a strong element of consciousness in its imagery and general tendency to delineate the relationship between Radha and Krishna in erotic terms. Paramanand's 'Radha Svayamvar' too celebrates the love between Radha and Krishna but as an emotional relationship rather than expression of the libidinous urge. It is not that the idea of physicality of love is altogether absent, but it is the psychology of love that dominates his interpretation of it. Prompted by devotional aesthetics, Paramanand depicts as a consummate artist almost every shade of emotion that defines a mind in love from nascent desire to passionate longing to pangs of separation to joy of union. And this depiction of emotion and feeling is as restrained as it is beautiful with the poet sublimating the erotic aspect as spiritual fulfillment. This is what we find in some of the most beautiful Rasa songs of the work. Describing the devotional raptures of Rasa Lila, Paramanand's himself appears to be immersed in the physical experience, identifying himself with the minds of Radha and the cowherd maidens:

Yes, to the circle dance and drunk with wine
Ecstatic thousands come to love and play,
Their interlocking arms a laden vine,
Their call to Radha, Radhkrishnaji

(Trs: Nila Cram Cook)

Paramanand has created Radha's image not by adopting ideas from the Kamashastra, but in accordance with his own artistic imagination, making her an embodiment of selfless emotion of love – love totally dedicated to the ideal it adores. She reminds us of Chandidas's Radha, who is proud because of her pride in Krishna, and beautiful because of the reflection of Krishna's beauty:

Tomarei garbe garbini hay
Rupasi tomar rupe !

In one of the most innovative passages of 'Radha Svayamavar' Paramanand shows Krishna observing Radha as she bathes and hiding away her garments. In trying to find them she catches hold of the Lord, and then she is lost in his arms and no one remains there but Krishna:

We have heard that the black bee
Goes into the jasamine
But not the jasamine into the bee
Yet Radha here disappears into Krishna!

This is the most beautiful moment of Radha's life as depicted in the work. In the terminology of Bhakti, this is *advaita*, the ideal state of non-duality! Here Paramanand shows Radha as inseparable from Krishna, his own "inner, self - identifying power". As for the Gopis, they are "a multiple personality" of Radha, a "composite entity", but like her they get submerged into the all - embracing Reality called Krishna, experiencing the bliss which Paramanand himself wants to share with them.

Apart from sublimation of erotic love, one of the most notable features of 'Radha Svayamvar' is its lyrical intensity. Not only has the narrative been

composed in the popular strains of the Kashmiri *vatsan* lyric with the first line coming as the refrain at the end of every three lines, hymns and songs have been interspersed throughout the work at emotionally sensitive places. Paramanand would himself be carried away by emotion while reciting these *lilas* accompanied by *madham* (a stringed musical instrument) and dance in ecstasy. Some of these songs have been composed in a queer but delightful admixture of Hindi, Panjabi and Kashmiri – a dialect that he himself calls Bhakha. Prof. Braj B. Kachru describes this mixed dialect as "code-mixed variety of Kashmiri". According to Master Zinda Kaul, the "mixed dialect" of these *bhakha* songs may be ungrammatical and unidiomatic, but all the same it is "delightful as it is amusing to guess his meaning and relish the depth of his tender thoughts of divine love and the high flights of his philosophy". It is interesting to note that at one place in Radha Svayamvar Paramand shows the cowherd boys and girls praising Krishna in Hindi!

Hindi zyevi suty asis totan
Hari tota ada-kaji bolano
Zonmut na kenh ta prema-ved paran

[They praised him in their own tongue (Hindi), lisping like parrots and mynas. Though they were illiterate they recited the Veda of love].

(Trs: Master Zinda Kaul)

Without going into the question of precedence or sequence, 'Sudama Charitra' appears to me to be a work of considerable maturity. Prof. Jai Lal Kaul attributes this to structural compactness, considering the fact there are a few – only two – songs in the work. But that could be because of the limitations of the story itself which does not leave much room for the imagination to have a free run. There is, however, a *bhava* or a great philosophical idea that runs through the whole

work like blood circulating through the arteries, and that idea is that of dissolution of the ego which alone gives one the capacity to experience the bliss that comes through the grace of God. Three hundred years before Paramanand the great Hindi saint - poet Surdas had woven the fabric of his poetry around the vision of God as man's friend and companion, and so had the German poet Rilke. We find the same vision at the centre of Paramanand's concept of the relationship between man and God in 'Sudama Charitra'. According to Paramanand it is the sense of ego in the individual soul that creates the illusion of separation or distance between the two who are otherwise closest to each other, in fact inseparable. The idea of separate individuality results from individual will and this is what proves to be the undoing of Sudama. This is illustrated Sudama eating "his own" rice stealthily, without sharing it with his friend Krishna, and this is what brings all the misery upon him, making him suffer immensely. But when *shubhechha* (good intention) prompted by *sadbuddhi* (right intuition) symbolized by Sushila (Sudama's wife) arises in the mind, the *jiva* (individual soul) starts his journey Godwards (towards Dwarka) and all suffering ends. Use of metaphor and allegory is a favourite technique of Parmanand, which he has employed in 'Sudama Charitra' also to interpret the episode of friendship between Krishna and Sudama on the spiritual plane as self-realization. This is what makes 'Sudama Charitra' a significant poetic work. Krishna and Sudama retain the natural and human aspects of their personalities even as they give movement and meaning to the story as symbolic characters. This is perhaps what Masterji means when he says that Paramanand's narration is "full of hints on the inner, spiritual meaning". The allegory, according to him, is like "five acts of a classical drama", where Krishna is God; Sudama is the human soul; Sushila, the wife of Sudama, is Buddhi or intention; Dvaraka is the 'Kingdom of God'.

'Sudama Charitra' does not begin with Sudama's tale of woes but with the childhood exploits of Krishna, describing which Paramanand exhibits Surdas-like

sensibility at places. Entire Vraj exults at Krishna's birth and the poet seems to join the chorus of voices hailing it:

Gati manza gash av chane zyanay
Jay-jay-jay Devaki-nandanay.

[Light dawned (on the world) out of the darkness when you were born. Hail, all hail, O you son of Devaki!]

His childhood frolics and pranks like the stealing of butter, the tending of cows with the cowherd boys, the teasing of Gopis, the simple joys amidst an idyllic setting fill the initial pages of the work. Every cowherd girl of Vraj rushes to Yashoda with her loving complaints just to have a glance of the child Krishna, to associate a few moments of her life with him, vying with each other for his attention.

"He breaks my milk-pots, and mine, and mine"

Harrassed by the complaints, Yashoda runs after him with a cow's halter in her hand to bind him. And what follows is one of the most beautiful passage of the work:

Muratagar yas na surat gande
Tas mani yas chha na durat gande
Gyan- dhyan gandanas chha na poshanay

[He whose likeness no painter can portray, he held in his heart by him alone who does not think him to far from him. Learning and contemplation fail to form an image of him]

The story of Sudama and his grinding poverty comes and develops in the context of these childhood episodes of Krishna's life. In the words of the poet, Sudama is not just Krishna's friend but an intimate part of his childhood:

Sudamaji os yar bhagvanas
Balabhav kya tu lokachar bhagvanas

[Sudama the Jiva (individual soul). was the friend of the Lord. O. the wonderful childhood and childish ways of him!]

But the sense of ego, of separate will. awakens in Sudama's mind. The feeling of individuality grows and strengthens. This is indicated by his eating his rice secretly which results in the separation of the two close friends who were one like the mind and the soul. With his innocence gone and ego getting the better of him. Sudama suffers inevitably and lives a life of abject poverty with his wife Sushila and children. The poet here focuses more on Sudama's egoism than on the description of his wretched condition. The only way he can free himself from worldly suffering is renunciation of ego, and so when his wife Sushila prompts him, he repents and the good intention to return Godwards is born in his mind. It is initially divine grace and mercy that makes Sushila to urge him to go to the Dwarka of Liberation, the abode of his childhood friend Krishna. With this the entire scenario begins to change. Krishna is shown here even more eager to meet Sudama. Overwhelmed by emotion. he rushes to greet Sudama even before he reaches the outskirts of Dwarka. Parmanand describes all this movingly, but without forgetting to invest it with a spiritual meaning:

Tora drav bhagvan Sudarshanay
Yora Sudama jiv gos arpanay
Panvunya vuchhan lajay svapanay

[On that side came the Lord, the Beauteous (self of all), on this Sudama. the *jiva*, surrendered himself to Him. Both felt as if they were dreaming (so overjoyed that they did not believe their eyes).] (Trs: Master Zinda Kaul)

The idea that Paramanand wants to impress is that friendship between the individual soul and God is not a one-sided affair but a feeling that both share, both desirous of coming close to one another. It is a relationship of pure love. When *jiva* or the individual soul dissolves his ego and surrenders himself before God's will, God too is filled with compassion for him and endows him with his grace. The feeling of separateness goes and this world of sorrow, vain and essenceless as it is, ceases to exist. Only bliss remains – an experience impossible for words to describe. And this is the experience that Sudama too has after he sets out for his rendezvous with Krishna at Dvarka. A glimpse of his state of mind as he begins his journey Godwards is given by Paramanand in these words:

Sodras thah tas ashine dhare
Nav nata nishana nav kor tare
Bhav tas hanz bathya ta ber havanay

[With incessant flow of tears he had taken a plunge, as its were, into the sea. Where there is neither name nor sign (of a route or destination), wither could he steer his boat? But Love became his pilot, (and encouraged him on by) pointing to shores (enroute).] (Trs: Master Zinda Kaul)

Wetting the path with his tears, he advances "little by little" towards his friend, forgetting "weariness and fatigue for his friend's sake", Finding Sudama so unexpectedly, Krishna too is overcome with such joy as one may find "sun during the night". This tine Krishna makes no mistake. He snatches the rice that Sudama had brought for him as a gift wrapped in Sushila's torn Sari. As if to clear Sudama's earlier debt, he starts eating it in handfuls till Rukmini holds his hand. And now Krishna sees himself alone filling all quarters. "Sudama was nowhere. Krishna alone was everywhere". Krishna may not have given him "even a broken

shell", but Sudama's entire outlook changes after his commission with his Friend. His poor little beat thatched hut" appears to him as beautiful as any (jawel bedecked palace. Sushila too receives divine grace. She sees Sudama coming from a distance "shining like the sun risen in the east". With ignorance gone their transformation is complete.

It is not as though his intimation towards allegorisation and metaphorical expression has made Paramanand forget the human and natural aspects of the story. Paramanand's success as a poet lies in the fact that he creates two parallel worlds of meaning by means of word-play, artistic use of puns and double entendre being his favourite devices. This ability to suggest more in few words with the help of allusions and verbal artistry reveals an important dimension of his creative genius. That is the reason why the natural flow of the narrative does not get chocked under the weight of metaphysical expression. It is a flow that appears to run unimpeded throughout the work. Thus, while we find in the reunion of Krishna and Sudama the idea of the ultimate union of the individual soul and the Supreme Being unfolded to us, we also hear the human heart of Sudama beating in situations of inner - conflict, doubt, puzzlement, apprehension, wonder and delight.

'Shiva Lagna' is the third and last narrative poem composed by Paramanand. It has for its theme the well - known Puranic story of Sati's rebirth as Parvati and her love for Shiva and her marriage with him. There are one or two additions and innovations which give the story some interesting twists. For instance, Sati is shown to meet her predicament because of having doubted the divinity of Rama. How can a man "who weeps and cries 'O Sita. O Sita!' be God?" she asks. And it is this *avidya* and doubting that leads her eventually to her self - immolation at Daksha's *yajna* and take re-birth as Parvati. Parvati's penance to obtain Shiva as a husband is also given a twist. Sages and saints are shown to come to dissuade

[illegible]

[illegible] sufficiently to suggest [illegible]

ii

[illegible] between the [illegible]

her, but she gets angry with the them. Finding her distraught, her parents send their family priest to in search of a match, but he is directed by Parvati to go to Kailasa where ... Shiva himself in the guise of the ascetic. Scared by the wilderness and upset by bitter cold, the priest returns after receiving from the ascetic (Shiva) a few coals to warm himself with. On his return he finds the coals turned into gold. Parvati's marriage with Shiva is fixed, and the rest of the story is as given in the Puranas. Here too we have allegory and the marriage between Shiva and Parvati is interpreted as the union of "one's self with one-self". 'Shiva Lagna' lacks the poetic beauty and depth of 'Radha Svayamvar' and 'Sudama Charitra', but at places we do find examples of metaphysics beautifully fusing with aesthetics. One such example is the description of Shiva's abode Mount Kailasa in winter:

There winter has its glass-house
And everything is of incomparable beauty
The crystal houses of ice have plinths of pearl
And Spring is agitated there
Looking at the glistening glaciers

The description of Shiva's procession has introduced a folklore-like flavour in the story, which has a charm of its own. The family priest's behaviour as the go - between in Parvati's marriage with Shiva and Shiva as the old bridegroom provide quite a stimulus for humour. Women do not fail to have a dig at the white-bearded divine bridegroom and his strange - looking marriage procession:

You ought to wait for some time, the woman said
Even your moustaches have not appeared

But there is not much beyond this in the work that merits attention.

Among the miscellaneous poems of Paramanand. "*Karma Bhumika*", 'The Tree and the Shade', "*Sahaz Vyatsar*" and 'Amarnath Yatra' are considered to be the most notable. However, not all of them are important from the point of view of Bhakti, most of them being didactic or mystical in tone. '*Karma Bhumika*' is a long poem which is considered remarkable "for the intimate welding of the farmer's round of duties with the spiritual aspirant's *sadhana*". Using the terminology of farming, the poem exhorts the aspirant to live life in accordance with high spiritual values. The main idea that the poem conveys is that it the seed of contentment is sown in the field of conduct fertilized by righteousness it will yield the harvest of joy. The poem 'The Tree and the Shade' emphasizes non-dualism between individual and universal consciousness. The two are basically one, the poet says, but appear to be different because of the individual soul's sense of ego. As soon as the awareness of oneness dawns, the ego vanishes, he explains using the allegory of the tree and its shade. Both Masterji and Prof. Jai Lal Kaul regard. Paramanand's poem concerning the pilgrimage to the Amarnath cave in Kashmir his highest achievement as a poet. The poem in which a parallelism is drawn between various stages of the pilgrimage and the yogi's ascent from *chakra* to *chakra* till his final entrance into the thousand petalled lotus. In '*Sahaz Vyatsar*', the poet appears to touch the highest point of his spiritual awareness. These poems go beyond outward formalism and sectarian considerations and emphasize the importance of the individual's identification with the Supreme Being through devotion. A look at his prolific poetic output, his oeuvre, is enough to convince one that Paramanand occupies a unique place in Kashmiri Lila poetry.

Inspite of their religious or Puranic theme his 'Radha Svaamvar' 'Sudama Charitra' and 'Shiva Lagna' are delightfully convincing in their social appeal also. In fact, these poetic works of his are compact of great poetry "combing the Vaishanvite fervour with Shaiva abandon".

5. THE RAMYANA THEME IN KASHMIRI LITERATURE

The Ramayana lore has exerted a tremendous influence on the Indian mind, holding equal fascination for the elite and the common masses and serving as an inexhaustible source of ideas and concepts for works of literature and art. In Kashmir too, as in other parts of the country, familiarity with the Rama-story has existed since very early times. Though not as pervasive as the Krishna legend, it has inspired a good body of creative and critical literature there besides permeating folklore forms such as ballads and wedding songs. In the Nilamata Purana, a 6th century text, we find Rama mentioned as an incarnation of Vishu, along with Sita and Lakshmana:

Chaturvimshati sankhyanam tretayam Raghunandanah
Harir manushoyo bhavita Ramam Dashrathatmajah
(vv 500)

[In the 24th Treta, Hari shall assume the form of a human being, Raghunandana, Rama, son of Dashratha.]

Ramam salakshmanam Sitam shesham eva dharanidharam
(vv 547)

Shatrughna's name has also come up along with Rama and Lakshmana at another place – *'Shatrughnau Ramalakshmanau'* (vv 913). As for Sita, an entire day has been kept apart during the Mahimana festival for worshipping as a goddess:

Ramapatni tatha pujya Sita devi prayatnatah
(vv 522)

[The goddess Sita, wife of Rama, should be worshipped with effort.]

The Nilamata also enjoins upon people to worship Rama along with Lakshmana and Sita during the ceremony related to the commencement of cultivation *Krishyarambha*. However, no events of Rama's life are described in this Purana although it speaks of Vishnu more than any other deity.

But in the Sanskrit literature produced in Kashmir we find not only ample evidence of awareness of the Ramayana tradition, but also of critical and creative writing based on

themes derived from it. Thus we have Anandavardhana speaking in his Dhvanyaloka about how *shoka* or sorrow was transformed into *shloka* or verse and pointing out that the Rasa theory was derived from the sorrowful utterance of Valmiki, the first of poets *"shokah shlokatvamagatah"*. At another place he protests against taking indiscriminate liberties with the Rama-story in the name of innovation as that goes against the theory of Rasa. Another great Sanskrit aesthetician of Kashmir, Mammata, made the famous observation *"Ramadivat vartitvayam na Ravanadivat"*(One should behave like Rama etc. and not like Ravana etc."), which has become our national heritage.

While several rhetoricians from Kashmir have cited the Valmiki Ramayana for illustrating their concepts, there have been others who have based their literary works on the theme. For example, the great 11th century polyglot Kshemendra has written the Ramayana Manjari, alongside "Bharatmanjari and the "Brihatkathamanjari", a work that runs into 6400 stanzas and follows the course of the story given in the Valmiki Ramayana. But far from being a mere abridgement of Valmiki's great epic, as is generally supposed, it is a re-presentation of the story with some portions re-done and several deviations and changes incorporated. Towards the end of the work Kshemendra, referring to Rama's exile in the prime of his youth, his life in the forest, the stinging loss of Sita and the mischievous gossip about her and her final predicament, says, "It is all sorrow":

sarvam dukhamayam tadastu bhavatam shlaghayo vivekodayah

[- It is all sorrow; may it lead you to blessed *vairagya* and *viveka*.]

In another work of his, the "Dashavtaracharitam", a poem on the ten incarnations of Vishnu, Kshemendra has given a short account of Rama in 293 verses. Curiously enough the account starts with Ravana's story, with Rama's story taken from the Panchavati episode and Ravana's attempt to carry Sita away. It concludes after several episodes of Uttarakanda or Rama's later life. Kshemendra also wrote a play, "Kanaka Janaki", on the later story of Rama, named so after the golden image of Sita with which Rama had to perform his *ashwamedha* as he had abandoned Sita who was languishing in Valmiki's hermitage.

Somadeva's "Kathasaritsagara" too contains some anecdotes of Ramayana, quite a few of them not found in Valmiki but in the Khotanese and Tibetan versions of the epic, as pointed out by Prof. P N Pushp. It may be noted, however, that these versions themselves are based on the story transmitted from Kashmir along with some other places. Even long before both Kshmendra and Somadeva we have the Kashmiri poet Bharatamentha, the author of "Hayagrivavadha", who is counted by Rajashekhara in the prologue to his "Balaramayana"as an author of the Ramayana theme along with Bhavabhuti and himself. Unfortunately, the work is not available today, as is the case with many other Sanskrit works from Kashmir.

While this shows that the Ramayana tradition in Kashmir has been vibrant in Sanskrit, we know of no work on the theme written in the Kashmiri language before the 19th century. This is surprising indeed, considering the fact that there is a great wealth of folklore – folksongs, folk ballads, folk tales, proverbs and sayings – in the language, drawing deeply upon the Rama story and making allusions to its characters and episodes.

Only a few decades back these folk songs and ballads reverberated in every Hindu home in Kashmir and were sung with great emotion. The absence of any literary work on the theme in Kashmiri for centuries on end till the 19th century is, therefore, difficult to explain without presuming that many such works may have been destroyed due to continuous political turmoil in the land after the advent of Islam. Surely, an undercurrent, of Ramayana tradition, however feeble, must have been present in Kashmiri in the period preceding Sikh or Dogra rule, as indicated by the existence of the profuse folklore inspired by it. Yet, the fact cannot be denied that Rama cult received a big boost because of the patronage of Dogra rulers whose tutelary deity Rama was, though prior to them Ragis or itinerant Sikh singers had played their role in popularising it by reciting passages from the Bhagavata and the Rama-charita-manasa alongside of the *sakhis* and *bhajans* from the Granth Sahib. Perhaps it was in this situation that Kashmiri poets felt encouraged to write on the theme and a number of Ramayanas appeared in the language in quick succession in a period of about one century. Each of these Ramayanas

has its own literary merit, with each author presenting the common theme according to his own creative genius and each interpreting the story in his own way. Chronologically, the first of these, according to Prof. P N Pushp, was the "Shankar Ramayana", first written in the Sharada script in 1843 and later transcribed into Devanagari characters during the reign of Maharaja Ranbir Singh in 1888. But the most popular and indeed the best of them was the "Ramavataracharita", more commonly known as "Prakash Ramayana", which was composed in 1846. It is also the only Kashmiri Ramayana to have appeared in print, the rest being still in the manuscript form. The next Ramayana to be written in Kashmiri was the "Vishnupratap Ramayana",composed by Vishnu Kaul in 1913. It was followed by Nilakanth Sharma's "Sharma Ramayana", which was written between 1919-1926 and modelled on Tulasidasa's "Rama-charita-manasa". Soon after it came the "Tarachand Ramayana" in 1927 written by Tarachand, and after it Amarnath wrote his "Amar Ramayana" in 1940. The seventh, and the last in series, was the "Ananda Ramayana" by Ananda Ram.

Prakash Ramayana

'Prakash Ramayana' enjoys immense popularity among Kashmiri Hindu masses, partly because the wide reach that it had on account of being printed in all the three scripts in vogue in Kashmir—Persian, Devanagari and Roman--, but mainly because of its folk diction, its poetic qualities and the songs and ballads interspersed throughout its text. Till recent decades its songs were on the tips of almost everyone's tongue and were sung in every Hindu home in the Valley on festive occasions, especially on weddings. The author of the work, Prakashram, lived in Kurigam, a sylvan little village some two or three miles away from the town of Qazigund on the Jammu-Srinagar highway. In the edition of the work published in the Roman script by Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1930, Grierson wrongly gave the author's name as Diwakar Prakash Bhatt, placing him in the time of Raja Sukhjeevan Mal (1754-1762). The scribe of the original manuscript of the work also created some confusion by giving its date of composition as 1804 Vikrami. That this was an orthographic error, was later proved by Dr. B N Pandit, who

gave the actual date as 1904 Vikrami, which corresponds to the year 1846 of the Christian era.

'Prakash Ramayana', actually consists of two works by the same author, the 'Ramavtaracharita' and its sequel the 'Lavakusha Charita', both later published as a combined text. The ballad with which the work opens, "*Rama-Lakhyman avatari ay*"(Rama and Lakshmana came as incarnations of God), is not considered by many to be Prakashram's work but a popular folk ballad incorporated by him in the text at a later stage. The first edition printed at Pratap Steam Press contains 2540 verses, while Grierson's edition in Roman script has just 1103, showing that it is only an abridged edition with several original episodes having been altogether dropped. In 1965, the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Literature and Languages published a revised and improved edition in the Persian script, edited with a critical introduction by Dr. B N Pandit. Later in the seventies Dr. Omkar Kaul conducted further research on the work and brought out a well-edited Devanagari edition, with Hindi translation, as did Dr. Shibban Krishan Raina. Dr. Kaul presented his study in the context of Ramayana tradition in other Indian languages. However, Dr. Kamil Bulcke, the noted Ramayana scholar, and some other Hindi scholars based their assessment of Prakash Ramayana on the version brought out by Grierson.

Structural Features

Prof. J L Kaul has described 'Prakash Ramayana' as " the first Razmia Masnavi in Kashmiri"—a view supported by a few other scholars also. But though it has absorbed some influences of the Masnavi style it can in no way be placed in the Masnavi tradition. It is essentially different from it, both in its spirit and form, and follows the pattern of, as the very title suggests, a *charita kavya*, that is, a narrative poem describing the life and exploits of a hero. And the hero in this case happens to be no ordinary human being but a divine incarnation born to deliver the earth from evil. The poet has made this clear at the very outset when he tells us that he is narrating the story of the *lila* or divine play of Rama on this earth to propagate the ideal of Bhakti. Rama, he explains, is the embodiment of the highest human values and, at the same time, the Supreme Being,

as such, the story of Rama is "a bridge that takes us across the river of desire" and leads us to truth. "The demon", says Prakashram, "is within us" and can be destroyed with the sword of true knowledge and the shield of righteousness as weapons. According to this symbology, Sita stands for "pure will"(at another place she is shown to be the Earth Goddess personified), Dashratha stands for Dharma, Kaushalya symbolizes the writ of destiny, Kaikeyi represents mind's fickle nature. Extending the allegory further, Hanumana symbolizes courage and Ravana falsehood; Sugriva, Angada, Jambavana and Vibhishana are all noble virtues personified. The whole action thus is shown as taking place inside the human mind. And with Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna and down to the humblest monkey in Rama's simian army shown as incarnation of this aspect of divinity or that, it is no wonder that the poet describes his work as having the "sacred ambience of the Puja-room". This, however, cannot be taken to mean that Prakashrama has ignored the human aspect of his characters. He has unfolded the drama of human emotions, passions and feelings within the parameters of a spiritual subject matter as artistically and skillfully as was possible for a poet of his age and grounding. His adroitness in blending the spiritual and the temporal in a way that both the religious-minded people and serious students of literature find it equally interesting, testifies to his poetic maturity. His Rama is thus as much the son of Dasharatha as the supreme object of worship for all human beings. What makes Prakashrama's Ramayana so interesting is that its narrative fabric is woven by placing the major characters in difficult and challenging situations wherein they have to make crucial moral choices and take equivocal decisions.

<u>Deviations and Variations</u>

As pointed out earlier, Prakash Ramayana follows the broad outlines of the story as given in the Valmiki Ramayana and Adhyatma Ramayana, but at the same time introduces several variations and additions that give it a certain distinctiveness. Taking liberties with the classical sources while depicting details, its author Prakashram presents and reorders the episodes according to his imaginative and creative genius. He treats some of them elaborately and leaves some out altogether or cuts them short. One of the main

beyond all attributes. Seeking to project Rama's image as the Protector of the Devotees and Deliverer of the World, Prakashram Kurigami draws upon both Valmiki and the Adhyatma Ramayana as his main sources with traces of influence from other versions of the Rama-story like the Ramacharitamanasa, Adbhut Ramayana and Krittivasa's Ramayana.

Following broadly the course of the story as given in the Valmiki Ramayana, Prakashram divides his narrative into seven *kanda*s or books – Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aranya Kanda, Kishkindha Kanda, Sundara Kanda, Yuddha Kanda and Uttara Kanda, exactly as we find in most Ramakavyas in other Indian languages. These *kanda*s are further arranged under sub-titles denoting various high-points of the story, following the Masnavi style. In the published versions, the 'Lava-Kusha-Charita ' has been incorporated at the end as a sort of epilogue without being given the nomenclature of a separate *kanda*. The metre used for narration is *bahar-e-hajaz,* a Persian metre in which Masnavis are generally written. There are also a number of *lila*s or devotional songs, lyrics and ballads interspersed throughout the narrative which have given Prakash Ramayana a unique texture--that of a folk-epic with its folk diction and colloquial style rather than that of a classical epic. Perhaps it is for this reason that Dr. B N Pandit has placed it in the category of the English ballad. It must be appreciated that in an age when Persian influence dominated the literary scene in Kashmir, and most Kashmiri poets freely plagiarized from Persian classics, Prakashram Kurigami showed the courage of choosing the Rama-story for the subject matter of his work and thereby offering something new and fresh and truly folk-oriented rather than dishing out stale tales from distant Persia in a highly artificial diction and hackneyed style.

In 'Prakash Ramayana', the story has been told in the form of a dialogue between Shiva and Parvati as in the Adhyatma Ramayana and to some extent in the Rama-charita-manasa. Presenting it as an eternal conflict between truth and falsehood, and good and evil, the poet has given it allegorical dimensions and has tried to find esoteric meanings in it. Explaining what he believes to be the "meaning of Ramayana", he has shown the battle between Rama and Ravana as going on eternally in the mind's Lanka. Understood

features of his work is incorporation of elements from folk versions in shaping some episodes. What makes it extraordinary is that it depicts Ravana, the King of Demons, as Sita's father, thus indicating a kind of Oedipus tangle at the root of the struggle against the forces of darkness. This appears to be a common feature in all Kashmiri Ramayanas, though the details differ in each case. The Adbhut Ramayana also gives its own version of how Sita came to be the daughter of Ravana.

According to the account given in Prakash Ramayana, astrologers declared Sita as inauspicious as soon as she was born, and Ravana put her in to a wooden box and shove it into the river. As the infant was washed ashore, a washer-man rescued her and took her to King Janaka who brought her up as his own daughter. Strangely, everyone seems to know this fact except Ravana.

Another departure from Valmiki pertains to the account of Jatayu's death. Prakash Ramayana shows Ravana forcing Sita to reveal the secret of Jatayu's death and accordingly he makes him eat stones smeared with his (Ravana's) own blood. Prakashram makes the episode quite touching by showing Rama himself performing the last rites of the valorous old avian devotee of his.

In his work, Prakashram tries to give a humorous touch to some of the episodes not found in the classical Ramayanas. For example, when Hanumana is brought bound in Ravana's court, he suddenly jerks his head in a manner that Ravana falls down from his throne and rolls straight into the river. At another place we see Angada running away with Ravana's crown and returning only after he has shown it to Rama and others in his camp, chuckling with glee and much pleased with his own self. Hanumana's burning tail, however, does not evoke laughter from Sita who feels greatly upset and prays to Agni, the Fire God, for protecting him from any harm. Tender affection for him fills her heart and in her distress she threatens the god that she will sweep him away in the flood of her tears if any thing untoward happens to Hanumana

The episodes of Hanumana's encounter with Makaradhwaja and of the Makkeshwara *linga* are purely Prakashrama's innovations not to be found in any other Ramayana. The story of the abduction of Rama and Lakshmana by Mahiravana to the nether world at the behest of Ravana who was fighting a losing battle is found in several folk versions, as, for example, in the Malayam work 'Patalravana'. The story has gone to South East Asia and is included in the Thai Ramayana. The Prakash Ramayana describes this episode with its main focus on Hanumana's extraordinary valour in rescuing his masters. But what makes it most interesting is the induction of the story of his chance encounter with Makaradhwaja, who turns out to be his own son. Born of Makari, a sea creature who swallows Hanumana's sweat when he was taking his great leap across the sea and becomes pregnant, Makaradhwaja is guarding the gates of Mahiravana's palace when Hanumana arrives there on his rescue mission. A mere boy, he challenges Hanumana to serious combat and fights valiantly, not knowing his identity. Hanumana feels inexplicably drawn to him even while playfully fighting with him. And while they are thus engaged, the wounded Makaradhwaja mentions the name of Hanumana as his father. Both are astonished when their mutual identities are revealed to them. In an upsurge of sudden affection, both of them hold each other in embrace and are choked with emotion as they relate their stories to each other. This meeting between the father and the son is one of the most poignant scenes in Prakash Ramayana, revealing the tender side of the personality of the great simian god whom everyone supposes to be as hard as the thunderbolt outwardly. This is something that we do not come across in any other work on the Ramayana theme.

The Makkeshwara Linga episode is unique in a similar way. It is entirely a product of Prakashrama's imagination. Shocked and disappointed at Mahiravana's death at the hands of Hanumana, Ravana goes to Kailasa to pray to Shiva and obtains from him a Shivalinga known as Makkeshwara to overcome Rama in battle. However, there is one condition—he must never put the *linga* down on the ground on his way back to Lanka as in that case it shall remain where it is and not budge from the place. But things do not go his way as Narada props up as though from nowhere and plays a trick—suddenly Ravana feels an urge to urinate. And when he is not able to resist it, he finds an old Brahmana

passing that way. Relieved, he requests the Brahmana, who is none else than Narada in disguise, to hold the *linga* for him till he returns. But Ravana's urine flows like a river and there seems no end to it. Seeing Ravana take so much time, the Brahmana puts the *linga* down on the ground and goes away. There is nothing Ravana can do to move it from there and he has to return to Lanka empty-handed and dejected.

In the Lava-Kusha-Charita too there are several episodes that occur nowhere in the classical Ramayanas, though they have close parallels in some other versions of the Rama-story. For example, Sita's banishment by Rama is shown to be the result of her sister-in-law's mischief and not the malicious gossip of the washer-man. The sister-in-law persuades Sita to draw a sketch of Ravana and then poisons Rama's ears against her, creating a doubt in his mind about her fidelity. Again, unlike any other Ramayana, Prakashrama's work shows Sita revolting in the end against the injustice meted out to her. She shuts herself up in Valmiki's hermitage and refuses to open the door for Rama despite his repeated entreaties to her to return with him to Ayodhya. Repulsing Rama's appeals, Prakashrama's Sita recapitulates the wrongs he had done to her. Valmiki's pleadings go in vain as Rama seems to have no answer to Sita's pathetic plaints.

Some other features peculiar to Prakash Ramayana are:

(i) Narayana appears to Dasharatha in a dream and make him aware that he has to descend on the earth as his son. It is after this that Dasharatha performs the *putrakameshthi yajana.*

(ii) There is no mention of Manthra and her attempt to incite Kaikeyee. It is Indra who asks Saraswati to delude her mind so that she asks Dasharatha for Rama's banishment to the forest.

(iii) Likewise, there is no mention of Shabari.

(iv) Parushurama's antics at Sita's *swayamvara* and Lakshmana's rebuff to him are not given in Dr. B N Pandit's version or the earlier versions. However, they are mentioned in the version edited by Dr Omkar Kaul



Prakashrama. But the poet is unsparing in showing Rama as extremely unjust in his repudiation and banishment of Sita even though he blames it on a supposed sister-in-law of Sita for the mischief. It is she who incites Rama against his faithful and beautiful wife, the embodiment of virtue. Prakashrama points out very poignantly how Sita has suffered since her very birth, yet he does not forget to remind us repeatedly that Rama is the incarnation of the highest reality and shows almost every character in his work, including Ravana, singing devotional songs in his praise and paying obeisance to him at one point of time or another.

Prakash Ramayana glorifies Sita, identifying her with Goddess Earth herself, perhaps for her endurance and patience, kindness and compassion, forgiveness and generosity -- qualities that have been tested to the limit. She is also venerated as Lakshmi, the Mother of the Universe, who has taken birth in the human form as the daughter of King Janaka and is the beautiful, charming and faithful wife of Rama for deliverance of the world from sin. Yet she is the most tragic character in the whole work, abandoned at the time of her birth by her real parents, abducted by the demon king who wanted to make her the object of his lust, forsaken by her husband to whom she has been faithful all her life and for whose love she had chosen to leave all comfort and luxury and accompany him to the forest. Prakashram Kurigami is one of those authors of the Rama-story who have brought out the tragic irony of Sita's life most poignantly. And perhaps he is the only author who has shown Sita revolting in the end against the grave injustice done to her by Rama. When even after having made her undergo the ordeal by fire Rama doubts her fidelity and banishes her to the forest, she can take it no longer and speaks out against the humiliation and suffering that Rama inflicts upon her for no fault of hers. This is a different Sita we come across in no other Ramayana. After having lived for many years in exile when she sees Rama coming to her, she refuses to meet him and shuts herself up in Valmiki's hermitage, not opening the door for him despite all his entreaties and recapitulating all the wrongs he had done to her. And when on Valmiki's insistence she finally makes her appearance at the court but is asked by Rama to furnish another proof of her fidelity, she prefers to ask Mother Earth for asylum. Her lament towards the end of the work moves the reader to tears:

(v) Rama is shown performing the obsequious rites (*pindadana*) of Dasharatha in the forest.

(vi) While Lava is born naturally to Sita, Kusaha is created by Valmiki.

Local Colour

With these enriching innovations and peculiarities, Prakashram's Kashmiri Ramayana has acquired a unique form and an important place in the Ramayana literature in Indian languages. Of great interest is the tendency in the poet to make an alluring use of local elements and local colour in his work. This has been done with such a great effect that the narrative appears to be placed in a typically Kashmiri setting. The pictures of Kashmiri life that the poet has depicted captivate the reader's interest -- the customs, the rites, the festivals, the beliefs and, more than anything else, the natural environments of the Kashmir Valley, all depicted with great felicity. There are numerous references to the melting of the snow and the advent of spring heralded by the birds of Kashmir. All the flowers of the Kashmir Valley are shown blooming in Ashokavana where Sita is kept in confinement by Ravana, with the joyous seasons of Kashmir prevailing even in Lanka turning it into a " *baga-bahara swargadwara*" or a "paradisal garden, a virtual gateway to heaven". These very flowers bloom in their full exuberance to welcome Rama when he returns to Ayodhya after his victory.

On Rama's wedding with Sita, all the goddesses of Kashmir – Pingala, Mangala, Vijaya, Sharada, Sharika, why even the 18th century Kashmiri saint-poetess Rupa Bhavani – come to bless them and shower flowers on them. Some even adorn them with ornaments. The wedding is shown taking place in the typical Kashmiri Hindu manner with rites and ceremonies like "*dwara puza*", "*posha puza*" etc. performed in all details. The wedding songs are exactly like those that Kashmiri Hindu women sing on such occasions—some of these songs having become very popular. Even nature is depicted at several places bedecked like a Kashmiri damsel and wearing the typical Kashmiri female attire – *puts*, *taranga* (ladies headgear), *pheran* etc.

So predominant is the local colour in Prakash Ramayana that even the names of the characters have been changed according to their local pronunciation. Thus, Kaikeyee becomes 'Keekee', Jatayu 'Jatayun', Sampati 'Sampath', Indrajit 'Indrajeth' and so on.

At many places in the work we find the contemporary feudal society of Kashmir and its ways reflected in quite an interesting manner. The guests attending Rama's wedding are shown attired in clothes of satin and brocade. People amuse themselves with *narud*, a game of dice played in the 19th century Kashmir, and *sedasta*, a card game popular among the upper- class gentry of the times. On the arrival of Rama and Sita in Ayodhya after their marriage, the poor and the Brahmanas are given so much in charity that they are "pressed under the weight of the gold". Astrologers are consulted for ascertaining the auspicious hour when Sugriva is anointed as king. Using Prakasharama's words, "Sugriva becomes the 'Shah', Angad the 'Wazir',and Hanumana the 'Peshkar'. As for Jamvant, he is riddled with tremendous responsibilities and is made the 'Kotwal' (the highest police officer) of the kingdom".

There are places where the poet appears to be referring to the atrocities committed on the Kashmiri Pandits during the horrible Afghan rule over Kashmir when it was order of the day to destroy their sacred threads. "Be a Brahmana and wear the sacred thread", Narada advises Hanumana. It is because of such features and pecularities that Prakash Ramayana has won a place in the hearts and minds of the common Kashmiri masses.

Characterization: Interplay between the Divne and the Human

Though the spiritual symbolization attached to the main characters and the allegorical interpretations of the events do not leave much space open for Prakashram to delineate individual traits and idiosyncrasies, he has shown artistic ingenuity in balancing the celestial and human aspects of their personalities. Within the constraints imposed upon him by concepts like *avatara* (incarnation) and *lila* (divine play), he has remarkably tried to develop them by placing them in situations where they are confronted by the problem

[illegible]

[illegible] and in [illegible] offered by Nature's wondrous [illegible] to amuse themselves with [illegible] card game [illegible] and him in [illegible] a chance that they [illegible] Ambulances are [illegible] for [illegible] the [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] that bridging between the Divine and the Human

[illegible] the main characters and the [illegible]

of moral choice and crucial decision. Thus Rama, the divine hero with unrestricted will, also takes up variously the roles of Dasharatha and Kaushalya's son, Bharata and Lakshmana's brother, Sita's husband, Ravana's implacable foe, an ideal ruler for the people of Ayodhya, besides the protector of the devotees and redeemer of mankind. While stressing on his superhuman exploits as God incarnate, Prakashram portrays the human side of his character with great sensitivity. What leaves the greatest imprint on our minds about him is his "unruffled equanimity" in all situations. One day Dashartha announces that he will be anointed as the king and the next day bowing to Kaikeyee's tantrums he banishes him to the forest for fourteen long years. But without losing his poise and without any trace of hesitation or regret, Rama accepts his fate, foregoing all the glory, splendour and pre-eminence that was to be his and saves his father the embarrassment of not keeping his word. His unequivocal assent shines out in the entire narrative most brilliantly. Taking tearful leave of his parents, and allowing an insisting Lakshmana and Sita to accompany him only after trying his best to dissuade them, he leaves for the forest but here another tragedy befalls him – he learns of Dasharatha's death and is stricken with grief like any human. Rama's imaginary conversation with his dead father in this hour of grief is one of the most moving passages in Prakash Ramayana. Here are some lines from it in close translation:

I would say: But how did all this happen?
Oh, how deeply grieved I am!
He would say: Look, I know your clothes are drenched with your tears.
I would say: I left my home and what terrible things have happened.
He would say: But home is where one finds happiness and comfort.
I would say: Ah, what can a man who has lost his father do?
He would say : Remember, God is everywhere.

And inside the outer shell of divinity we see a human heart beating. When Ravana abducts Sita, we again find Rama distraught with sorrow, "shedding blood instead of tears" and asking the stars in the sky about her whereabouts. The dye is thus cast with his great battle with Ravana. We see him in a similar inconsolable state of mind when Lakshmana loses his consciousness on being struck by an arrow during a fierce battle with Indrajit. Nothing much uncommon here except the folkloric touch peculiar to

"Hanumana arrived with a message for me
Hail, hail, O Rama of high status!
Said he (Hanumana): Shri Rama is coming to you himself
Days of separation are over now
This much was enough for me
Five days passed and had I committed a sin?
God knows what was whispered in his ears and by whom?
He rendered me pinionless;
I withered away in the bud
Lakshmanji came again to hoodwink me
I was to be taken off to the woods
He left me there alone
...Darkness overtook me at noon...
That day my star Brahaspati was in ascendancy
It was dead of night
I gave birth to Lava and Kusha
All my regrets came to an end...
Even then you did not desist from taunting me, my darling Sir,
You shot an arrow at my breast
...Which came out no doubt, from my back
What indeed has destiny written upon my brow?
Why otherwise should I have suffered all the calumny?
Into the Earth shall I descend
Let Earth become cropper.

(Trs.: Prof. Pushp)

This tale of Sita's woe underlines the suffering and struggle of a woman in a world dominated by patriarchal values. Interestingly, the place where Sita enters the chasm in the earth is given in Prakash Ramayana as Shankarpura -- a village in the vicinity of Srinagar

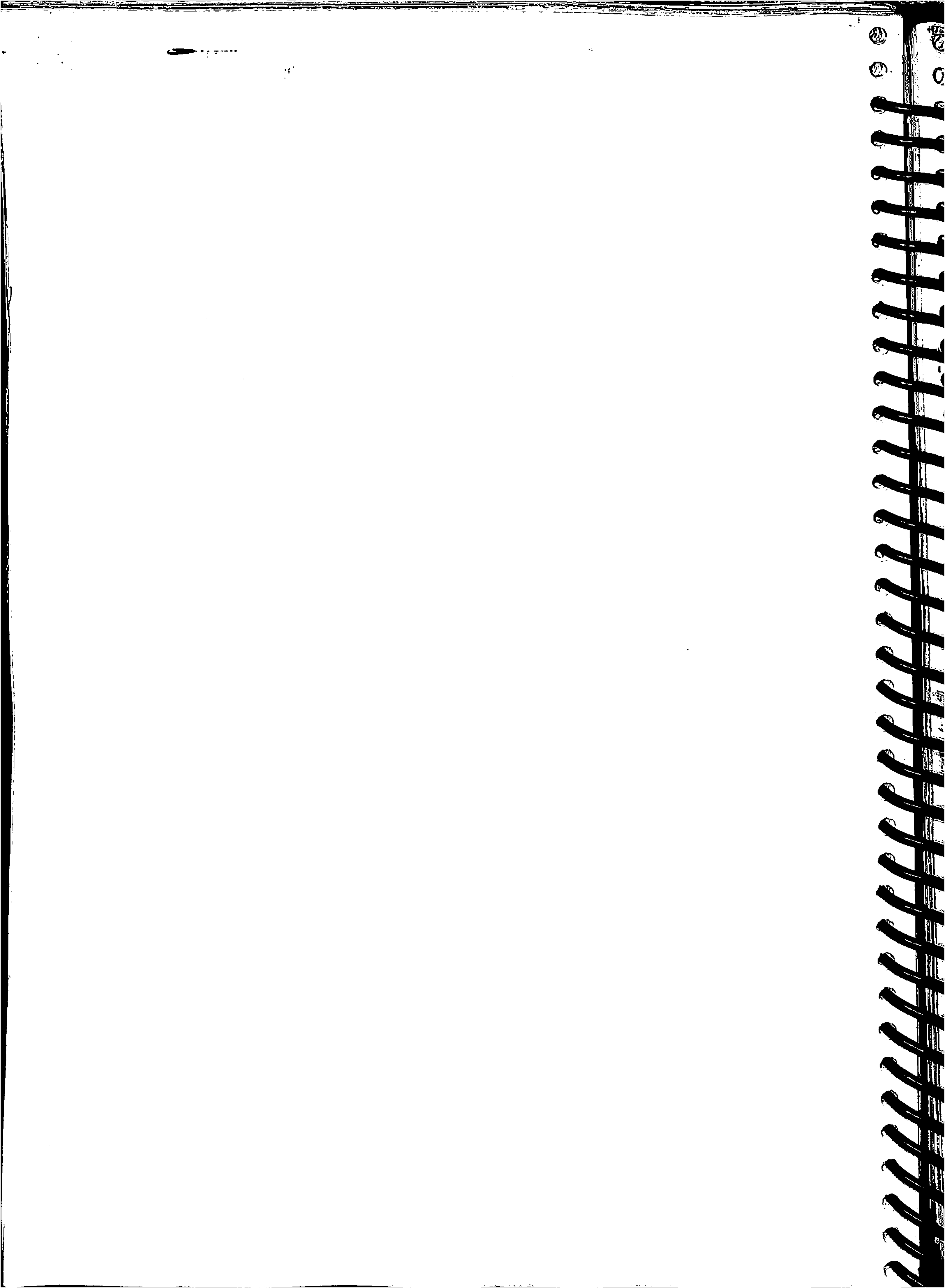
Prakashrama's portrayal of Laksmana in his Ramayana conforms to his traditional image presented in other Ramayana works, with slight variations here and there. His loyalty to his elder brother, his ascetic self-denial, his valour, his fiery temperament (though not as fiery as it is in some other works on the Rama-theme) – everything has been brought out in a way that endears him to the common reader. His pious anger flares up at the slightest hint of injustice as, for example, in the episode of Rama's exile. His first impulse on hearing the news of Rama's banishment is to forcibly prevent Dasharatha from carrying out his unjust order, but later, on being restrained by Rama from doing anything rash, he insists on accompanying Rama to the forest – a request he finds difficult to reject. We do not find Prakasrama's Lakshmana reacting as strongly to Parshurama's provocations during Sita's *swayamvara* as in the Ramacharitamanasa (in some versions of the work, the episode does not occur at all), but his outspokenness appears to be as conspicuous here as in any other Ramayana. When Rama decides to banish Sita to the forest, Lakshmana openly accuses his elder brother of heartlessness and tells him that he has lost his sense of justice. Compelled to obey Rama's command, he takes the innocent Sita to the forest with a heavy heart and leaves her there with tears swelling in his eyes. Finding it impossible to face her and witness her totally undeserved suffering, he goes away from the spot on the pretext of getting some water for her to drink. His inner conflict and near rebellion against his elder brother's injustice, who quite ironically is also his ideal, has been well brought out by Prakashram. However, his image as a valorous side- hero does not quite impress in his acts on the battlefield, particularly in his fight against Indrajit. The poet has presented him as an incarnation of Sheshanaga, but this aspect has not been much stressed.

Hanumana's portrayal in Prakash Ramayana is of great human interest, although he has been presented as "Halmat Ladar", an incarnation of Rudra. He appears throughout the work as an embodiment of "valour, wisdom and heroism", bringing hope and cheer to those in desperate situations and carrying out impossible missions which no one else can accomplish. When the mission of Sugriva and his monkeys to find Sita is about to fail, he, awakened to his great power by Jamavanta, appears on the scene as hope personified. Crossing the vast sea in one great leap, he brings the much-needed news about Sita and



lifts the pall of doom that had descended over them. After meeting Sita and consoling her, he offers to carry her back to Rama, a proposal that Sita does not accept as that would mean a reflection on Rama's prowess. He then makes a mockery of Ravana and his might right in his court and sets the "golden" Lanka on fire with his burning tail. And when Lakshmana lies unconscious on the battlefield on being wounded by Indrajit, it is Hanumana who accomplishes the near impossible feat of bringing the Sanjivini herb to revive him, relieving an inconsolable Rama from his grief. All these are familiar episodes of the Rama-story, but Prakashrama's treatment makes them very appealing for the common reader. Hanumana achieves even a greater feat by killing Mahiravana and bringing his masters, Rama and Lakshmana, back on his shoulders from the nether world where they had been abducted to. Here by a masterly touch of imagination, Prakashrama makes Hanumana meet Makardhwaja, who turns out to be his own son. Both the father and the son are swayed by affection after coming to know each other's identity. This tender side of the valiant hero's personality, a most unlikely father, is revealed in no other Ramayana. Prakash Ramayana, no doubt, presents Hanumana as an ideal devotee of Rama, but he is also something more than this – a most loveable character whose human qualities like courage, heroism, leadership, intelligence, selflessness, concern for another's distress, discrimination, endear him to every reader.

Prakashrama's Ravana is a valiant anti-god symbolizing the forces of *adharma* or evil – a perfect foil to Rama who symbolizes *dharma*. He is arrogant, self-conceited, egoistic, wrathful, drunk with power and, more than anything else, lustful. He has subdued all the gods, who live in great fear of him as do the *rishis* and hermits whose penance he disturbs and *homas* he disrupts. It is lust that ultimately proves his undoing, and arrogance. Yet he has his qualities too and like Milton's Satan we find ourselves secretly sympathizing with him at times, for instance, when we see Hanumana disrupt his *yajna* by abusing Mandodari and thus forcing him to leave it incomplete. And also when he obtains the Makkeshwara *linga* from Shiva – whose great devotee he is -- and is cheated by Narada of it. He is shown to be a diplomat too – he tries to incite Angad against Rama by asking him to avenge his father's death. Similarly, he writes a letter to Sugriva offering him a pact of friendship. Ravana is thus not shown to be all vile and contemptible. Even Rama



recognizes his great scholarship and wisdom and sends Lakshmana to him to pay him tributes and learn something from him in his dying moments. In his heart of hearts Ravana is also shown as a devotee of Rama – a unique feature of Prakash Ramayana. He prays to Rama for deliverance from sin for he knows that "one who recites the name of Shri Rama shall dwell in Vaikuntha" and says, "I (Ravana) have all the faith in you". "O Lord", he prays, "remove the darkness of my mind and fill it with your divine light, for the person enlightened by you can have no worry at all". This is how Prakashram endows even Ravana with a redeeming feature.

Other Kashmiri Poetic Works on the Rama-story

Prakasharama seems to be convinced that the Rama-story is the gateway to deliverance. While his contribution to the Ramayana literature in Kashmiri is immense, there are several other poets also whose works deserve to be noted. These, the authors of Shankar Ramayana, Ananda Ramayana, Vishnu Pratap Ramayana, Sharma Ramayana, Tarachand Ramayana and Amar Ramayana – mention could be made of Lakshman Kaul 'Bulbul's' Ramagita as well—have their own individual merit and place. Unfortunately, they are still in manuscript form due to which their circle of readers has been very limited. They need to be properly worked upon and published for a better assessment of their literary worth. Here we will have a brief look at them:

Shankar Ramayana

Chronologically, the Shankar Ramayana was written before Prakashrama's Ramayana, in 1843 to be precise. Later in 1888, it was transcribed from Sharada into Devanagari characters. A voluminous work composed entirely in the lyrical style in five volumes and 44 chapters, it gives the story from Rama's birth to his ascent to heaven with the lyrics having different refrains in different chapters and each individually related to different episodes of the story – something akin to the Gitavali of Tulasidasa though in no

way inspired by it. This stylistic characteristic gives Shankar Ramayana a separate place in the Ramayana literature of Kashmir.

The inspiration and influence of the Valmiki Ramayana and Adhyatma Ramayana can be clearly discerned in the work though. In the Shabari episode, the poet himself acknowledges the influence of Adhyatma Ramayana, which is also indicated by the intense devotion expressed by the poet for Rama and the space devoted by him to the glorification of his name. The story too has been presented in the form of a dialogue between Shiva and Parvati with a long Shiva Charita given in the beginning, wherein Sati takes the form of Sita and tests the divine nature of Rama when he is suffering the pangs of separation from Sita. Later she becomes free of doubt and apologizes from both Rama and Shiva. There is such a profusion of the spirit of Bhakti in Shankar Ramayana that it shows Rama taking birth in a four-armed form with the gods showering flowers on him. On Rama's wedding also all the gods, including Brahma and Shiva, take part and show reverence to him.

Another feature of Shankar Ramayana is the predominance of local colour as in the Prakash Ramayana. The poet has introduced local elements in his description of nature, narration of incidents and depiction of the characters' feelings, making it easy for an average Kashmiri reader to identify himself with them.

Ananda Ramayana or Ananda Ramavatara Charit

The Ananda Ramavatara Charit, which is also known as the Ananda Ramayana, was written by Anand Ram Razdan in1888. Although the poet has followed the convention of beginning the work with hymns and prayers in praise of the Guru, Ganesha, Shiva, Rama and Vishnu reclining on Sheshnaga, the work is not divided into *kandas* or books Various high points of the story are indicated by sub-titles. Like his predecessor Prakashram, Ananda Ram has also incorporated lyrics and devotional songs as integral part of the narrative, many of them being written in the style of folk songs

Starting his narrative with Rama's birth and concluding it with Sita's entry in to the earth, the poet introduces many new stories and thus shows his innovative and creative skill. The birth of Sita is one such episode wherein he shows Sita as Ravana's daughter following the Kashmiri tradition, but adds a story about Ravana's previous birth. According to the story, Ravana molests a beautiful woman in a previous birth, and she curses him that she will be born as his daughter in another birth and become the cause of his destruction and of his entire family. In the next birth Rishis hand over a pitcher of blood to Ravana that he gives to Mandodari to drink, taking it to be ambrosia. This makes Mandodari pregnant, but alarmed by the forecast of astrologers Ravana causes her abortion and gets the foetus placed in a closed pot and buried in Janakapuri.

In another innovation, Ananda Ram shows Sita slaying Mahiravana, something we come across nowhere else. According to the account given in Ananda Ramayana, Sita describes Mahiravana's extraordinary prowess before Rama. An infuriated Rama launches an attack on him at Uttarakhand but is defeated along with his entire army. On this, Sita first smiles and then assuming the form of Mahakali, slays Mahiravana, cutting all his nine heads one by one.

Ananda Ramayana betrays influences of other works also. For instance, the meeting of Rama and Sita in the flower garden of Mithila and Ravana's humiliation on not being able to break the bow are incidents based on the Rama-charita-manasa. The battle scenes in it are particularly impressive, giving an impression of the poet's descriptive skill. The battle between the armies of Rama and Ravana is shown to continue for nine days and has been described in great detail. One important deviation from the traditional story about Lakshmana's loss of consciousness is that it is Ravana and not Meghanada who shoots the fatal arrow at him. Ravana does so clandestinely when he finds Meghanada's position weakening in the battle. Ravana is also shown taking resort to magic or power to create illusion on several occasions as in Prakash Ramayana, with Rama of course defeating all his moves

The original manuscript in Persian and its copy were till the recent exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits with the poet's descendants in his village in Kashmir.

Vishnupratap Ramayana

From the point of view of poetic merit, Pandit Vishnu Kaul's(real name Vishambhar Nath) Vishnupratap Ramayana is the most significant work in Kashmiri on the Rama theme after the *Prakash Ramayana*. The work, as its title suggests, has been dedicated by the author to Maharaja Pratap Singh though, according to Abdul Ahad Azad's history of Kashmiri literature, he did not personally hand it over to the Maharaja as, being an ordinary teacher, he could have no access to his court. The Ramayana has been written in the Persian script in two volumes and the author himself has given its date of composition as 1913.

The Vishnupratap Ramayana is a voluminous work running into 30,000 verses and 348 chapters, all the chapters being included in five *kanda*s or books. The largest *kanda*, designated as the Vanavasa Kanda comprises 161 chapters, but it incorporates the Kishkindha Kanda and Lanka Kanda as well. Azad's view that the Vishnupratap Ramayana is a translation of Valmiki is not confirmed by facts, though it cannot be denied that it is mainly based on his great epic. The author has, however, made several additions and changes in the story, besides giving expression to his own views and ideas on *bhakti*, spirituality and ethical and moral issues at various places. There is a profusion of local elements in the poet's description of nature and social environment. In the Ramalila Kanda, he has even shown Rama going on a tour of Kashmir. In fact, we come across lively images of contemporary Kashmiri life in the work.

The body of the work has been considerably enlarged by including numerous side-stories and additions. It appears that Vishnu Kaul is not able to restrain himself from incorporating any and every tale that comes to his mind. For example, the story of Ganga's descent has been described in full detail from Sagara's sacrifice to Bhagiratha's

successful penance. Similarly, we have the account of Dasharatha and Kaushalya's previous birth as Kashyapa and Aditi in which they obtain a boon from Vishnu that he will be born as their son in the next birth. After this, we have the sage Vasishtha explaining the purpose and significance of Rama's incarnation in detail. Again there is a long discourse between Vishvamitra and Vasishtha when the former comes to ask Dasharatha for sending Rama and Lakshmana with him to protect his *yajanas* from being disrupted by the *rakshasas* which so impresses Dasharatha that he sends the two brothers to accompany Vishvamitra without any hesitation.

At several places the Vishnu Pratap Ramayana has been influenced by the Ramacharitamanasa also. This influence can be discerned in the dialogue between Kaka-Bhushundi, the episode of the boatman Guha, the burning of Lanka, the slaying of Ravana, Trijata's dream about coronation of Vibhishana and a few other episodes. At a number of places the poet has given a different twist to the story by making changes in it independently. One such incident relates to Lakshmana's loss of consciousness where Sumitra is shown to be greatly perturbed on seeing a bad dream. As for Sita's birth, the Vishnu Pratap Ramayana gives a slightly different version of the story given in the Ananda Ramayana. It shows Mandodari conceiving after inhaling the stench coming from a phial filled with seven drops of blood of the seven *rishi*s and after that repeats the story given in the Prakash Ramayana.

Conception of Rama as the Supreme Being and advocacy of humble devotion to him is the dominant note of Vishnu Pratap Ramayana. But whenever Vishnu Kaul comes down to the temporal plane from the exalted ground of Bhakti he gives a free expression to his poetic mind. His description of Sita's state of mind suffering the pangs of separation away from him in Ravana's Lanka is indeed moving. She is shown "shedding pearls-like tears" with even the birds and trees affected by her distress. Her heart is like "a lute with its strings all broken". The grief of Rama and Sumitra at Lakshmana's loss of consciousness has been described in words full of pathos. Ravana has been portryed as a lonely and dejected figure after the loss of Meghanada and Kumbhakarana. These portrayals show Vishnu Kaul as a sensitive poet. Though the influence of Prakash

Ramayana is all too evident in his work, the author of Vishnu Pratap Ramayana has his own place in the Kashmiri literature as a narrator of the Rama-story.

Sharma Ramayana

Pandit Nilakantha Sharma's Sharma Ramayana is considered as an important contribution to Kashmiri Ramakavya. Divided into eight *kanda*s, this poetic work was completed by its author in 1926 after working on it for seven years. These *kanda*s are designated as Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Kishkindha Kanda, Sundar Kanda, Lanka Kanda, Uttar Kanda and Lava-Kusha Kanda. The poet himself has acknowledged that his work has been greatly inspired by Tulasi's Ramacharitamanasa. This influence is amply reflected in not only the choice of episodes but also in descriptions and dialogues with certain passages reading almost as translations as, for instance, the description of the rainy season in the Kishkindha Kanda where lines upon lines have been rendered into Kashmiri. The episodes which show a clear influence of Tulasi are the meeting of Rama and Sita in the flower-garden before their wedding; the breaking of Shiva's bow; the meeting of Rama and Sita with the sage Atri during their exile in the forest and Anusuya's advice to Sita on a faithful woman's duty towards her husband; the transformation of Pratapabhanu and his family into Rakshasas as a result of a curse and taking rebirth as Ravana and his brother Kumbhakarana, with his minister being born as Vibhishna; the episode of the boatman Guha; the Kakabhushundi-Garuda dialogue; and the Shabari episode. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that the entire work is a translation of Tulasi's opus. Even in these episodes, Nilakanth Sharma has shown flashes of poetic imagination and innovative skill by adding new elements and presenting his own viewpoint at several places.

Variations and additions made by the author are also numerous, adding charm and interest to the narrative. Parvati's story has been incorporated as a part of the story of Rama, right from her birth to her marriage with Shiva. Rama and Hanumana are shown to meet and develop friendship during childhood days. The episode of shadow Sita has been taken from the Adhyatma Ramayana. Rama asks Sita to make her abode in the fire

till he extirpates the demons. Thereupon Sita enters the fire and Ravana abducts a shadow Sita. After the *agni-pariksha*, the real Sita is restored to Rama. Potrayal of human emotions and feelings has been beautifully done at a number of places. Love and its various aspects and nuances have been described quite effectively, though in a conventional manner. Sita's pangs of separation, Rama's distress and frantic search for her after her abduction, Rama's grief on Dasharatha's death and Lakshmana's unconsciousness all have been sensitively described. Even Mandodari's sorrow on Ravana's death is quite moving. She has been likened to "a frost-covered lotus" and her helpless and wretched state has been touchingly portrayed. Some of the battle scenes are very impressive. As for Sita's birth, Sharma Ramayana has followed Tulasidasa's version completely.

Tarachand Ramayana

The Tarachand Ramayana shows a deep influence of the Ramacharitamanasa, and to some extent of the Adhyatma Ramayana also. Comprising eight *kanda*s and102 chapters, this narrative poem was written by Pandit Tarachand in 1927 in the familiar style of Kashmiri Ramayanas with lyrics incorporated in the text. Some episodes occurring in the Sharma Ramayana appear in Tarachand Ramayana also with some variations. Dasharatha and Kaushalya have been shown in this work as Manu and Shatarupa in a previous birth. Pratapabhanu takes birth as Ravana under a curse here too, but as the grandson of Pulastya. Child Rama feels drawn towards Hanumana and plays with him. Both purchase rubies from a ruby-seller. Here we find Vishnu and not Ravana molesting a young woman – the beautiful wife of the demon Jalandhara -- who curses him that he shall take birth as a human being. As part of the curse, Jalandhara was to be born as Ravana and abduct the wife of Vishnu born as a man.

The Shabari and Nishadaraja episodes occur here also, borrowed obviously from the Rama-charit-manasa. About Sita's birth, the story of the pitcher filled with the Rishis' blood is repeated with the change that it is the Rishis instead of astrologers who warn Ravana that his Death will be born from the pitcher. Thereupon Ravana gets the pitcher

buried in Janakpur so that King Janaka, whom he considered to be his enemy, would die. The flow of the narrative is smooth and unhindered, and characterization impressive. Here too the local elements abound in descriptions.

Amar Ramayana

The latest in this series of Kashmiri Ramayanas is the Amar Ramayana, which was written by Amarnath 'Amar' in 1940. In this Ramayana the narrative instead of being divided into *kanda*s or chapters has sub-titles to indicate high points of the story. The work appears to be influenced by the Gandhian philosophy and reformist ideology, with its emphasis on Harijan uplift and widow re-marriage as can be seen in the episodes of Shabari and Guha and Sugriva's marriage to Bali's widow Tara. Widow re-marriage, it may be noted, was a burning social issue for the Kashmiri Pandits those days. About Sita's birth, Amar Ramayana repeats the story given in Anada Ramavataracharita.

Other Works

Among the works based on the Rama-story in Kashmiri, mention must be made of Lakshman Kaul Bulbul's Rama Gita. In this work Rama is shown giving instruction to Lakshamna on spiritual and moral matters and in this process the author also gives expression to his own philosophical views. He has also tried to incorporate the story of King Bhringa and the Brahmana's curse in the narrative, but his focus on the narration of the story is not as sharp.

6. THE CONCEPT OF BHAKTI IN KRISHNA JOO RAZDAN

After Lalleshwari, and perhaps Paramanand, the brightest star in the firmament of Kashmiri Bhakti Poetry is without doubt Krishna joo Razdan, the lilting cadences of whose devotional songs continue to enchant Kashmiri minds. But while Lalleshwari's devotion is related to an impersonal God, whom she calls Shiva, and is based on the philosophy of absolute non-dualism between God and man, Krishna joo Razdan's Bhakti correlates belief in a personalized God and an impersonal view of the Ultimate Reality. The two, in fact, represent two different, though not necessarily opposite, strands of the Bhakti spectrum. Krishna joo Razdan places Bhakti above every other mode of worship, but does not believe in divorcing it from Jnana. Lalleshwari is more intellectual in her approach, upholding as she does .the non-otherness of God, and yet her spiritual experience is rooted in mysticism for which her philosophy of monistic Shaivism provides ample scope. However, the idea here is not to attempt a comparative study of the ideological standpoints of the two great Kashmir saint-poets in relation to Bhakti, but only to point out the fact that in Lal Ded, we find a philosophical concept of Bhakti and in Krishna joo Razdan an emotive concept of Bhakti. Both the devotional currents eventually converge and Krishna joo Razdan too appears to explain things in terms of the Kashmir Shaivite interpretation of reality. Here, we shall talk and concern ourselves with the perception of devotion as it flashes in the poetry of Krishna joo Razdan.

Born in Vanpuh, a small village in South Kashmir, exactly in the middle of the 19th century, Krishna joo Razdan lived and wrote in an age when the pan-Indian Bhakti movement had lost much of its steam. Krishna joo represented a resurgence of Bhakti that did not have its antecedents in the theorizations of

any particular sectarian text. The form of Bhakti that we find expressed in his poetry is a product of the local cultural and socio- political climate that prevailed in Kashmir as a result of the transition from the despotic rule of the bigoted Afghans to the rule of the Dogra Maharajas. With the memory of the holocausts and horrors of the Afghan rule still haunting the racial memory of the Kashmiri Hindus, the tendency to take shelter in devotion to a benign personal God who protected the pious and upholds the cosmic order was but a natural development which found its expression in Kashmiri Lila poetry.

Krishna joo Razdan looked at the world with the eyes of an unattached person, but at the same time he was intensely attached to God as the source from which all positive values of life emanated. And thus, while non-attachment is present as the basic perceptive element in his poetic expression, a chiaroscuro effect of attachment and non-attachment is ~~present as the basic perceptive element in his poetic expressional~~ chiaroscuro effect of attachment and non-attachment emerges from it in an extremely charming form. Razadan places Bhakti above everything else in life as he considers it to be an instrument for grasping the ultimate reality. Bhakti for him is a *bhāva* or a feeling, a state of mind, a "matter of emotion" that satisfies the human craving for a supreme personality who can be adored and to whom prayer can be addressed.

That is why he regards it to be the most valuable thing one can acquire, in a string of pearls for which he is prepared to pay the highest price:

> O wise buyer, do not take my pearls of Bhakti for something cheap
> that can be purchased from the market place
> They are not false
> Considering them to be so could only be too naïve
> They are of the highest value!

At another place, he uses the same metaphor to present Bhakti Bhāva as an alternative to escape from existential anguish. One has the freedom of choice, he says, to wear or not to wear the pearl string of Bhakti:

The choice is yours:
You are free to wear the string of pearls
that Bhakti is
(or not to wear it)
There is no compulsion
No one is there to restrain you
You have the independence to act
Go on make your choice.

It is Bhakti Bhava alone that pleases God, that takes one to God, and for that sincerity and simplicity of mind is an essential pre-requisite:

Tothan chhukh tsuy bhakti bhavas
Shyama rupa lagayo rama navas

[- You are pleased with one who approaches you with Bhakti Bhava. Oh Rama, I adore you in the form of Shyama].

Tothan chhukh tsuy sedyan to sadan
Pamposha padan vandayo pan

[- You are pleased with those alone who are straightforward and guileless. I devote myself to your lotus feet, O Lord.]

Loving devotion for God flows as an overpowering current of emotion or bhava in Krishnajoo Razdan and it is with this *bhava,* that he hails his chosen deity in one of his most popular songs "*byal tay madal*"--- his

whole body and soul consumed by its fervour "It is with intense Bhakti Bhava that we hail you, O great Lord Shiva. We offer banquets of *bel* (wood-apple leaves), *madal*, *vyana*, roses and lotuses for your worship".

Regarding Bhakti as an *anubhava,* an inner spiritual experience, Krishnajoo Razdan seeks to cultivate a deep emotional and personal relationship with God based on it. God, he believes, is someone unto whom one can surrender and whom one can love and depend upon"

My boat is caught in a raging storm
Rocked by waves in the midst of the ocean of existence
And you alone can take me across.

This world is a vast and turbulent ocean,
Shoreless and impossible to cross
Take me into your lap
O Shambhu, take pity on me .

In front of me there is blazing fire
Behind me an heap of explosives
And placed in this situation I am supposed to do my work
O Shambhu, take pity on me.

The search for God, he feels, is not easy and smooth. It involves great pain and suffering, and the anguish of separation from Him is unbearable. Identifying himself with a woman looking for her separated lover, Krishna joo Razdan describes his state of mind thus:

I have fallen into the vicious trap that the world is
And my only hope lies in you
For you alone can free me from the tangle
O my eternal Lord, my Shiva!

Approaching you with an intense feeling of devotion
I am searching for you on the Harmukh Mount
For you alone can dispel
The darkness of delusion, my Lord.

Sometimes he portrays himself as Radha, or a Gopi waiting for Krishna in gardens and meadows:

I am Radha waiting for Krishna
If he comes
I would offer my very life for him
Oh, how my heart has been stolen by
the son of the cowherd Nanda !

I am looking for young Krishna
In gardens and the meadows,
Along the banks of lakes and ponds,
By the side of the waterfalls
I think of the Lord who had subdued
the (*Kali*) *naga*.

It was in this state of mind that he wrote his sweet and mellifluous Rasalila songs which are among the best written in any language. Far from being indecent and obscene, these songs present Rāsa as a dance of spiritual ecstasy — an eternal event that takes place not in the outside world but in the mind's Vrindavan, transcending the limits of time and space:

My own mind is Vrindavan
And Narayan my own soul!

Here is how Rasa is portrayed by him in one of his beautiful songs:

O come, and let the dance be our delight
For when the Gopi's Lord began to dance
Six months had passed as though a single night!
The seasons watched enraptured in their trance,
A month flew as an hour, a year a day,
A thousand eras we will dance away!

[Trs. Nila Cram Cook]

These songs have an element of *rahasyānubhava* or mysticism about them, which coupled with their musicality, makes their appeal irresistible. What is most interesting from the point of view of our present study is that these rapturous songs of Rasa and Krishna and Radha's divine love occur side by side with Krishna Razdan's equally enchanting and deeply devotional songs addressed to Shiva. The fact is that the great saint - poet does not take any doctrinaire or sectarian position in respect of Bhakti, but feels equally drawn to both Shiva and Krishna like the poet Jayadeva. He has also written panegyrics to the Mother Goddess and other deities, trying to synthesize various devotional currents and subsuming all personal deities in his concept of the Ultimate Reality, as all of them according to him are but its different manifestations.

Krishanjoo Razdan did not believe in intellectualizing devotion, his concept of Bhakti being essentially emotion- centred or feeling -centered. It is was his belief in personal God that led him to understand Bhakti as cultivation of an emotional and intimate relationship with Him. Yet, the Bhakti he talks of does not exclude *jñana,* but can be viewed in conjunction with it. For him, there is no antagonism between *bhakti* and *jñana,* as both go hand in hand and complement each other. The Vaishnava Acharyas, Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka and Vallabha also take this position as does the Shaiva

school of philosophy with which Krishna Razdan seems to have a close affinity of thought. His attitude towards the relationship between Bhakti and Jñana appears also to be influenced by the Bhagvad Gita in which Krishna explains that Bhakti is not devoid of Jnana nor is Jnana devoid of Bhakti. Thus, at the end of the 18th chapter of the Gita we have him saying:

"By means of devotion he (the aspirant) will know what I really am. And then knowing me, will become one with me"

Krishnajoo Razdan considers knowledge to be essential for Bhakti, for when knowledge dawns, Bhakti too gets deepened. He prays to the Guru therefore, for giving him the vision of true knowledge:

Give me the vision of true knowledge
With oneness of mind bring me closer to yourself
O Satguru, show me light in this darkness

A Bhakta, is also a Jnani, he believes, and then proceeds to describes the characteristics of a Jnani - Bhakta, devoting an entire poem to it. In the poem titled "Characteristics" of a Jnani" he says:

One who desires Moksha, knows his own self
One whose ignorance has been dispelled,
Know that person's body to be the sacred Kashi.

One whose mind is immersed in God, who is dead while living
One who always remembers the dying moment and gives charity
One who has the good fortune of showing loving devotion to God
Who does not believe that the One has a second,
He alone is Jnani - a man of knowledge:

These lines clearly show that Krishnajoo Razdan not only sees knowledge of the self as related to love for God, but also finds no contradiction between Bhakti and the monistic view of God. God is infinite love himself, and knowing that leads to loving devotion for him, which in turn leads to liberation. So, in Krishnajoo Razdan's view, Bhakti results in the feeling of oneness and identification with the object its devotion and it is this feeling that helps to grasp the Ultimate Reality. So, as Prof. Krishna Daya says in the book "Bhakti: A contemporary Discussion", "there is always an element of feeling associated with reasoning, but for the attainment of Mukti, it is Bhakti that takes as forward".

The Shaiva philosophy of Kashmir, which had a great influence on Krishnajoo Razdan, as did Advaita Vedanta, goes little further and says that more than just feeling, Bhakti is Shakti itself. This Shakti, according to Prof. Shiv Kumar Sastry "is introduced into mind for its own betterment, for its own spiritual uplift. For the purpose of creation, Shiva –Shakti manifests itself in the form of the world. This is the *pravritti* of Shakti. For the purpose of liberation, Shakti becomes Bhakti in the mind of the devotee and the dawn of Shakti in man is the dawn of Bhakti in him. So it is technically called by the Shaivites as *shaktipata.* It is through this *shaktipata* that a *sadhaka* begins his journey". ("Bhakti: A Contemporary Discussion: P-11). Call it Bhakti or Shakti, what helps in the attainment of liberation is "divine grace itself, which Krishnajoo Razdan calls "*anugraha*".

Atmabodh kulyisuy chhu dayi anugrah mul

[- The tree of self - awareness has God's grace as its root.]

But without Bhakti one cannot have God's *anugraha* or grace and without *anugraha* there can be no *moksha,* which for Krishnajoo Razdan is the goal he most aspires to attain:

Say Gopis to Udhavji, "Stop preaching to us this dry Jnana of yours. It is by Bhakti alone that Mukti can be attained".

In a long poem "Zagatuk Bhanda Jashna", ("A Folkplay Called the World") he pictures himself as a jester trying to amuse God with his acting and asks him to reward him with an order granting him *moksha*:

> For me, Krishna, take out your pen-holder
> And issue orders granting me *moksha*
> as a reward!

But for receiving God's grace, one has first to dissolve the ego and surrender to Him completely. This is something that Chaitanya and the Vaishnava *acharyas* also stress upon as an important pre-condition for obtaining the capacity to love Krishna. They call love the *ahladini shakti* or the "joy giving power" of Krishna himself, for he appears to the devotee in the form of love. This is Prema Bhakti, which we find Krishna Razdan so often celebrating in his poetry, particularly when he talks of Krishna and his Rasa with the Gopis and Radha. It is a means of breaking one's ego and seeking merger in God who is an embodiment of love. This is a stage when there remains no sense of difference and the self merges with the Supreme Consciousness. In the words of Krishnajoo Razdan:

> 'Buy-buy' travith path rozi 'tsuy – tsuy'
> [- Leaving behind "I-I' there remains only 'you-you']

This takes us to another aspect of Krishnajoo Razdan's Bhakti – the non-dualism between God and Man, which finds repeated mention in his poetry despite his belief in a personal and determinate God. It is here that he seems to be influenced by the monistic view of cosmic reality presented by Kashmir Shaiva philosophy and Advaita Vedanta. Identifying his chosen deities Shiva

and Krishna with *'nirguna, nirmal'* and *'nirakara'* Brahma, he express the view that God resides within one's own self and as the all-pervading spirit pervades the whole universe. There is no need, therefore, to look for Him outside, for what is outside exists inside also. And not only that, what is *saguna* and *sakar* (having attributes and form) is *nirguna* and *nirakar* (attributeless and indeterminate) also. He is one and also many. To quote some of the poet's own lines:

You are doer, non - doer and un-doer as well
You are one and yet you are many
You are without any attributes, and yet your attributes
redeem the Bhaktas.

A bubble appeared on the surface of water
But is it away from the ocean?
The bubble bursts and merges with the water.

Brahma, the impersonal ultimate being was within me
But I lost my senses and looked for Him outside
Like one who looks for his child in the whole town
When he is actually there in his arms!

O You, who are beyond Maya, without any beginning or end
Who can fathom your unfathomable depth?
O you, who are infinite and inaccessible,
Beginning of the beginning of things
Hear, O hear, my anguished cry !

Krishnajoo Razdan feels the presence of this indefinable, infinite and unfathomable spirit everywhere. He identifies his chosen personal deities, Shiva and Krishna, with it, directing his love and emotion to them. He sees

Krishna as spring embodied whose coming turns the entire world lush green, and Shiva to him is the King Swan resplendent in his white coloured plumes.

Shyama has come, looking dark and beautiful
Wearing robes of the colours of spring
The whole word has become green
O look spring has come!

The King Swan has come to my house
My desire has been fulfilled!

Krishna Razdan does not find any incompatibility between faith in a personal God and the idea of an immutable and eternal reality with neither name nor form, for he believes that reality can express itself in different forms. This concept of Bhakti is based on a flexible attitude reconciling Saguna and Nirguna, feeling and reason, determinate and indeterminate and accommodating contradictions and paradoxes. Behind it seems to be the Shaiva belief that everything is a part of everything else. On the one hand he accepts and tries to explains abstractions about the oneness of God, and on the other hand he identifies personal deities with the supreme consciousness pervading the world, making no distinction between Shiva and Krishna, and Rama or different manifestations of the Mother Goddess. In one of the beautiful lyrics in 'Shiva Lagna', his magnum opus, he presents, the idea of the non - duality between Shiva and Krishna thus:

He whose complexion is dark as the night (Krishna)
Has come to our house, with morning in his arms (Shiva)
See how they look like the beautiful white and black colours of the eyes!

"Shiva Lagna' is replete with such images, emphasizing oneness of Shiva and Vishnu — something that we find in many other miscellaneous lyrics of the poet also. In fact, Krishna Razdan appears to be keen at synthesizing various traditions of Bhakti, advocating unity of different personal deities and identifying them all with the one transcendent divinity pervading the entire universe. He equates Shiva and Vishnu with the Nirguna Brahma which reveals itself as Self - Luminous Reality. In one of his songs he says:

He is self- luminous
But those without sight are not aware of it
Like the bat who cannot see in daylight.

In many other poems also he uses light as a metaphor to describe God. This is due to the fact that his concept of the Ultimate Reality is rooted in Kashmir Shaivism, which speaks of it as Prakasha and Vimarsha or light and self-consciousness. Unfortunately Shiva Bhakti and Shaiva concepts of Bhakti have been constantly ignored by those theorists who have concentrated more upon the Vaishnava tradition and have identified Bhakti with devotion to the incarnations of Vishnu alone. But in Kashmir, Shiva - Bhakti has always been the dominant current, though the tradition of Vishnu - Bhakti has not been ignored or marginalized.

As the Shaivite philosophy evolved in the Kashmir region forms the metaphysical base of much of Krishna Razdan's poetry, particularly in "Shiva Lagna', it will not be out of place to have a brief look at it. According to this philosophy, it is Parama Shiva alone who exists as Universal Consciousness and manifests itself as the phenomenal world with the help of His cosmic power, Shakti. The individual soul is also of the nature of Parama Shiva, the two being identical. But Parama Shiva exists in the individual soul in a contracted state, which He assumes by His own Maya Shakti. The universal consciousness contracts itself in order to approach particular objects and

becomes individual consciousness. It is the non-recognition of its absolute nature and identity with the Ultimate Reality that makes the soul feel bound. Once the soul recognizes its own true nature, it assumes the nature of Shiva and is able to recognize its identity with the self-luminous principle of Universal Consciousness. Absolutely monistic in its content, Kashmir Shaiva philosophy describes Shiva as "the one inner Atma of all individual souls. It is immanent in the universe and assumes its form and is endowed with undivided I-consciousness in the form "I am this". The ultimate goal for the individual aspirant is, therefore, to recognize the essential identity of his soul with the Absolute. It is this monistic philosophy upholding "the absolute unity of Reality and the oneness of the individual soul and Shiva, that is reflected in its essence in Krishnajoo Razdan's 'Shiva Lagna', and in fact sums up his views about the relationship of God, Man and the World. So far as Bhakti is concerned, Shaivite thinkers like Abhinavgupta define it as a process of "transcending bodily, vital and mental consciousness and the merging of the limited soul in the Absolute Consciousness". It is the "attainment of definite knowledge" of the identity of one's soul with the Absolute, that is the highest form of Bhakti, according to Achinavagupta. Writes Dr. Krishna Sharma in her book 'Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective': "No doubt Abhinava Gupta states all this in relation to the worship of Parama Shiva and his divine power, Shakti. But at the same time he dwells on the ontological nature of Shiva and Shakti. He describes Shakti as full of transcendental consciousness. The worship of Shiva and Shakti with supreme devotion, he states, should be continued with until the limited soul is purified of all taints *(mala)* and gets identified with Shiva / Shakti as one reality. It is the unity of Shiva and Shakti as one reality that forms the theme of Krishnajoo Razdan's 'Shiva Lagna', which also seems to endorse and the Shaiva thinker Ramakantha's view that the "immediate experience of the absolute non-dualism itself is the highest devotion".

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Dear Shri Susheel K. Mittal,

Kindly refer to your letter No: A- 4761-14 relating to the final proofs of my paper **Formation of the Kashmiri Language and Some Early Kashmiri Works.** I have read the proofs and am returning these after making corrections wherever required.

With regards,

Shashi Shekhar Toshkhani